HELP WANTED

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"SCOTT & SON, EH! THERE IS NO SON! NOW YOU GO TOO!"

HELP WANTED

A NOVEL OF TODAY DONE FROM
JACK LAIT'S GREAT PLAY

BY
WEBSTER DENISON

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"Scott & Son, eh! There is no son! Now you go too!" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

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"Everyone must start sometime," he said encouragingly. "I'm doing that myself" 31

"Now, scream, will you? There's no one here to hear you, so scream till you're hoarse" . . 247

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INDUCTION

Fifth Avenue awakened with a yawn. That is the whole world's prerogative. But only Fifth Avenue and its kind know the luxury of it.

The opera had been dull last night. Laruso had a cold. Mrs. Vandiver had neglected to wear the new tiara. Young Von Fredricks had not been seen whispering soft nothings into the ear of Mrs. Lambert.

Gossip lagged. Ennui flourished. So, Fifth Avenue—the feminine side of it—yawned again.

But at noon, under the exhilarating influence of hot chocolate it bestirred itself. Life has its drudging duties. There was a function at four.

Great fortunes are not joined every day and even wedding anniversaries are endurable when they commemorate such a union as Helen Barker's and Jerrold R. Scott's. What

a blessing the children, now grown to the eligible age, are both hers. That precludes a family romance. Some day the Scott millions will be divided.

Fifth Avenue is getting its eyes open now. By five it will have forgotten the hospitality of the elders and begun matchmaking for the heirs.

. . . . . .

In a tenement on Second Avenue Mrs. Samuel Meyer smooths down the last bit of lace on the last piece of lingerie and glances at the clock. It is nearly four.

The Scotts' mansion is crowded now and in a moment the felicitations of fawning hundreds will be showered on Helen Barker Scott.

In a moment, too, Mrs. Meyer's daughter will return from the school of stenography and carry a basket of laundried lingerie to its owner.

But if Mrs. Vandiver's lace hadn't been too delicate for mechanical resuscitation Mrs. Meyer wouldn't have got the job. And if

she hadn't so prospered, she and her daughter Gertrude wouldn't have had any supper.

So, the world is pretty fair in its favors, after all.

* * * * * * *

HELP WANTED

CHAPTER I

APPLICANTS

THE obsequious Mr. Herrick Crane, head bookkeeper to Scott & Son, has had a busy morning. The ante-room to the private office of the firm's senior member is crowded with applicants for a position. Mr. Crane obtrudes to so inform his superior.

"But can't you see, I am busy now, Crane," snapped the importer. "When a man cuts short his vacation to get back on the job I should think you'd have tact enough not to bother him with such trivial matters as the employing of a stenographer. Select one yourself."

"Yes, sir, but—"

"But what?"

"I am only following instructions, sir. You

know, you told me this one was to be your private secretary and that—that you wanted to pass on the young lady yourself."

"Very well. Let them wait. I'll ring for you."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Jerrold R. Scott having thus subdued a servile subordinate and clothed himself in the mantle of pseudo dignity befitting his station and the occasion, settled down, not to the pressing duties that had shortened his vacation, but to contemplation of the business at hand—choosing a good looking secretary.

The subservient Crane was not deceived. This was a scene that had been enacted without end in the sanctum of his employer. He had turned away hundreds of girls because he knew that for reasons other than material ones Scott would not even question them concerning their experience or efficiency. On the other hand, with a sort of inherent rebellion against the tactics of the importer, Crane took a fiendish delight in retaining for his chief's consideration most palpable types of the ineligible—quick spoken, sharp featured young

women who conform as closely to the lines of male attire as the law will allow.

He usually ushered in this kind first, and with folded hands and guileless air stood by reveling inwardly at Scott's discomfiture, until a curt, "That will do, Crane," dismissed him from the august presence.

Scott's perspicacity always fathomed his clerk's motive and that made the enjoyment of the ruse the keener.

The bell to the inner office summoned him now, and, beckoning to a Tartar that he had detained with especial relish to her demerits, he again approached his employer, and stood peering through the half open door.

"Plenty of applicants on hand, Crane?" Scott queried.

"The room is crowded, sir."

"Show me one of them."

The clerk motioned to the modern virago and ushered her in. Scott had not glanced up from his desk. A chair had been drawn close to his. He busied himself with some papers.

"That's all, Crane," he ordered.

"Yes—sir."

But the bookkeeper stubbornly delayed his departure. He was not to be deprived of his joke. Scott looked up quickly with an austere rebuke for his subordinate's stupidity, and his eye traveled from the clerk to the twentieth century Amazon at the door. The withering glance that he directed to Crane then was enough. It vanquished him—left him quivering between the realization of his temerity and the joy of its fruits.

"You're a stenographer?" asked the importer, motioning the girl to the seat.

"I have been an expert typist for nine years and can take any kind of dictation and have won prizes for rapid operating and—"

"Just a moment, please," the millionaire interrupted with upraised hand. "What's your name?"

"Sarah Pennington."

"Age?" he asked, outwardly the acme of sobriety, but chuckling at the question within.

"Thirty-six."

"Why did you leave your last position?"

"The building burned down."

"And before that?"

"The firm went out of business. The senior partner died."

"And the one before that?"

"Let me see," said the girl, reflecting. "Oh, yes, that was in a lawyer's office. He was arrested for robbing his clients and sent to jail."

"Merciful Providence!" exclaimed the importer, rising. "Were you born on the thirteenth?"

"No, why? Do you think I'm unlucky?"

"I'm afraid I must confess to such trepidations," Scott answered in suavest tones. "I'd expect the house to be falling about my ears."

"You're not superstitious," the young woman scornfully suggested.

"No, but I don't like to take chances. I'm afraid I cannot court a cataclysm. Pardon me, Miss Pennington, if we are not suited to each other."

He touched the bell.

"Kindly show the young lady out, Crane," he ordered, with a gesture of mock gallantry toward the door.

Then he whirled on his employee.

"I gave you credit for a little sense, Crane, but you pick your stenographers like you do everything else. Now please bring in a human being."

The young woman ushered into the office now evoked a smile from Scott—a sort of "glad to see you smile," but supercilious, too, since the intensity of the look with which she regarded him was disconcerting.

Physically her attractions were unquestionable. Crane had noticed this, and observing, too, the business like manner in which she applied to him, had been hopeful if not sanguine concerning her interview with the chief. If Scott must have pretty secretaries, let him have efficient ones, also, he prayed.

The girl's lips parted as she approached Scott, revealing rows of pearl like teeth. "You will pardon my abruptness," she began with a laugh, "but I am familiar with the necessary requisites for application and may save you some tiresome questions. My name is Catherine Wiggins. I am twenty years old, have had three years' experience as an amanu-

ensis and my salary request is fifteen dollars a week."

"Very clear and very kind of you, I'm sure," said the millionaire. He had regained his poise and retained his winning smile.

"Do you live at home?"

"No, sir, my parents live in a little city in Jersey. I am boarding at the Young Woman's Christian Association."

"That's my advantage," suggested the employer, naïvely. "I have been without a secretary for a number of days and considerable work has accumulated. I may want her successor to work with me an evening or two to clean up."

"I'm afraid I couldn't do that."

"Your evenings—are—occupied?" Scott drawled out the question. His tone intimated just a bit of doubt, or displeasure as if he expected *his* secretary to be free from other duties.

"No, it isn't that," the girl divined quickly, "but I have an aversion for night work in office buildings which I acquired shortly after I began it."

"A little unusual," suggested the importer, kindly. "I should fancy your evenings would be tiresome and a bit lonesome—a bright young woman like you all alone."

"Sometimes I am lonesome, Mr. Scott. Most decent young girls who have to work for a living *are.*"

"Hm—" he grunted credulously. "I shouldn't say that. No attentions; no—" he stumbled over the word—"sweethearts?"

"Not yet. Most of the young fellows are so silly; the other ones seem to be all married."

Scott approached her coyly.

"My dear young lady," he said slowly, "does that make so *very* much difference, if you're *really* lonesome?"

She raised a gloved hand in a charming, but convincing gesture of rebuke.

"Just so—much—difference," she mimicked, "that I'd rather *be* lonesome."

"Oh, come, now," the millionaire insisted, though he halted in his approach, "a little, harmless flirtation now and then?"

"There are no *harmless* flirtations."

"Very well, Miss Wiggins," he acquiesced.

"I have no especial personal reason for plying you with questions, but I always find it interesting to sound the viewpoints of others."

"Yes," she retorted naïvely, "other people's viewpoints certainly come under the head of valuable information. They so often disconcert in time one's best laid plans and save such a lot of useless trouble. And mine—along certain lines—have been thrust upon me. They're not of my own choosing."

"Oh, come now," he continued affably, "don't you think some of them make you a bit extreme; maybe, a bit prudish?"

"No, I wouldn't call them that, Mr. Scott. I don't think it's prudish not to accept favors I can't repay without being afraid to be alone with my conscience. I don't think it's prudish to decline to dine with a man who would jump out of the nearest window if his wife came in. If that, and refusing to give kisses to a man who has no right to ask them, except for the reason that a girl has to work for a living—if that is prudishness, then I guess I'm guilty and I'm just a bit proud of it."

"But why talk of kissing other women's husbands?"

"They suggest it, as it were."

"You don't think *I* would make any such overtures, I hope."

"Do you want the truth?"

"Certainly."

"Yes, I think you would—once."

"My, you're quite frank!" exclaimed the millionaire. "Frank and interesting. But granting, for the moment the truth of your suspicions, why only once?"

"Because, after that you would either stop or I would go. And I think you would stop. Some girls have a way of disarming the enemy. I feel that I have."

"So you distrust me, yet you have no hesitation in accepting a position in my employ?"

"None, whatever, Mr. Scott. I am my own protection, and I might be a protection for you, too."

The importer raised a hand in dissent.

"Thank you, I need none," he said with some show of asperseness. "You misjudge me. In a measure you are perhaps right, but I am

afraid you are inclined to exaggerate the attitude of men in the business world, as so many young women unfortunately do. I have no doubt, of course, that there are many men who would make advances to so attractive a young woman."

"Yes, and I almost wish I were not so attractive, as men call it. It cost me my last position and several before that."

"Being pretty and *particular,* I suppose *is* a trying combination."

"It just keeps me trying. However, I'm wasting your precious time. What is the verdict?"

"My dear young lady," the importer answered with mock sincerity, "I should be extremely happy to have you in my employ, but in justice to the other applicants, I think I should see them."

He took out his watch and rose from the seat to which he had retreated.

"Now, if you will return at say eleven o'clock—I will let you know."

"Very well," she agreed. Moving toward the door, she turned and added roguishly:

"I suppose you want to sound a few more viewpoints?"

Scott shook his head and smiled an adieu. He recalled Crane and faced him.

"Your intuitive penetration, sir, is only exceeded by your personal magnetism."

"Yes, sir."

Scott's fist banged upon the desk.

"Banish that 'yes, sir,' to everything I say, will you? Are those the only words you know?"

"No—sir."

"Well, then kindly tell me, if it isn't too great a tax on your mentality, how long you've been with this firm."

"Twenty years, sir."

"Yes. Twenty years. And you know my preferences and prejudices, or should know them. And you know that I told you half an hour ago, I was busy. But you insist that I give up my morning to a lot of hair-brained stenographers—unemployed ones. That is all right, since you insist on it. But you rub it in by first submitting me to a human scarecrow, then to a veritable Xantippe—in all but

looks," he added under his breath. "Now I'm going over to the bank. The rest of your choice selections will have to wait. When I return I want to see some young woman whom I am willing to employ as a secretary and who is willing to be employed. You understand me, Crane?"

"Yes, sir, but—"

"Yes, sir, *but*. Yes, sir, *if*—Again, Crane, for Heaven's sake but *what?*"

"I should say, sir, that—that—this last young lady—Miss Wiggins, sir, was a very—capable person."

"You should say? Who is asking you to say? Besides, Crane, I don't want a person! I want a secretary. Now, don't annoy me any further. I'll be back in half an hour."

"Yes, sir."

Scott banged the door to his private entrance and left a meditative Crane.

"He is hard to please, this time," mused the bookkeeper. Then, with fears allayed for the time, he chuckled: "Maybe, I've spoiled him."

. . . . . .

CHAPTER II

SCOTT & *SON*

JACK SCOTT, junior member of Scott & Son, had but a very hazy recollection of the time when he was other than the son of Jerrold Scott. There came to him from the dim past fleeting glimpses of a day when halls were darkened in the big mansion on Fifth Avenue and servants walked on tiptoe. He recalled how one, whose special mission in the household seemed to be to controvert his childish wishes, had broken in upon a battle of tin warriors just when he, as generalissimo, had led a battalion of flaring redcoats to victory over Gauls. He remembered that she took him through hushed corridors to the big bed-chamber at the front, where, propped up on pillows, there lay but the shadow of the real Augustus Barker.

He could picture the girlish figure of his mother as she knelt beside the bed. He knew

that she had turned and, catching him in her arms, had lifted him up to his father and that he, with a vague sense of doing what he was expected to do, had kissed a burning brow. He knew that when the hot tears came to his own cheeks it was not through any sense of the catastrophe at hand or of impending loss, but because his mother cried, and that was something he could not bear.

So, in the days that followed when the house was still darkened and a stifling fragrance of innumerable flowers pervaded it, he knew only that he seemed very much alone and that his mother always wept.

Three years passed and the odor of roses filled the house again. Hosts of people came and went as before, but white, or colors, replaced the grewsome black. Then he was no longer John Barker, but John Barker Scott. The assumption of his name was a boon which the new father courted.

"When Jack grows up it will be 'Scott & Son,' " he told his bride and she assented.

And this, eighteen years later, was the day of the promise fulfilled. Jack had entered his

stepfather's establishment that morning as a full-fledged partner.

Proud and happy now in his new found importance, he came into the private office to consult his senior and found him gone. He tarried for a moment, breathing in the atmosphere of the boss's sanctum—the inner circle of a great enterprise of which he was now a part.

He felt the thrill that any right-minded boy, rich or poor, feels when he takes his first position among the world's workers. Perhaps it was the more enjoyable in his case because it was voluntary, or, at least, unnecessary. He might have prolonged his playtime after the college days indefinitely, if he had cared to. There is plenty to attract the idler in New York, especially one so fortunately situated as Jack Scott. Europe, too, is a magnet for the average son of a millionaire, but Jack was different. He was no prude. He enjoyed his fun as much as anybody and he had an unlimited supply of it at school. But he had learned the lesson that most boys learn who come out of a big university with any kind of colors

—that to enjoy play it is necessary to temper it with attention to the material things. He had to work to maintain his class standing and he had to work to hold his own among the athletes. It was fun if you got the right viewpoint. That was what college had done for him. It had given him a true perspective and he was eager to take up the struggle where he had left off.

He was equipped for it, too, was young Scott. From his father's side he had a heritage of shrewd, almost cunning business tact combined with nervous force and energy, and from his mother's a genial manner and gentleness that won him friends.

It was a combination that means much to a man of the world—the ability to push self without knocking everyone else down in the process. So far these characteristics had asserted themselves only in their formulative state, but they were inherent and thoroughly intrenched.

Physically the boy was also favored. He was a little under the usual height and might have been called slight, but he was molded in

a perfect frame and possessed virile and vigorous strength. His light hair curled and lay closely matted to his head. His blue eyes gleamed and twinkled. His step was quick and elastic and his speech kept atune with that. And when Jack Scott smiled one knew he meant it. It was a full-hearted smile.

The boy's position as a partner in the firm was, of course, only a nominal, or honorary one. He had yet to climb the ladder, but he was most fortunately launched on the undertaking. His first duties were to be those of clerk in the auditing department and he had come now to consult his father concerning his induction to them.

An opening door arrested his departure through Scott's private entrance. He turned to see a girl timorously withdrawing through the outer door.

"Come in," he called, a little confused. "Were you looking for—me?"

"I was looking for a position," the young woman answered. "I came in answer to—to that advertisement for a stenographer. I must have gotten into the wrong room."

"EVERYONE MUST START SOMETIME," HE SAID ENCOURAGINGLY. "I'M DOING THAT MYSELF"

"That's all right," the young man responded amiably. "I don't know about the ad, but I'll find out for you. The hall boy must have gone out. Come in and sit down, won't you?" he urged, as she seemed undecided. "I'm Mr. Scott. Who are you?"

"Gertrude Meyer."

His smile reassured her. She advanced toward him. But she said incredulously: "Are *you* Mr. Scott?"

"Certainly," he laughed. "Not *the* Mr. Scott, but I'm one of them. I'm the son," he added, pointing to the newly painted sign on the door. "And are *you* a stenographer?"

She flushed at his good-natured accent of the pronoun.

"I hope to be," she faltered. "I haven't found a position yet. It's so hard without experience."

"Everyone must start sometime," he said encouragingly. "I'm doing that myself. You know the most experienced had to be beginners in some place."

"I suppose that's true, but I hope they didn't all have as many disappointments as I've had."

"Disappointments?" he echoed sympathetically. "Have you been looking for work so very long?"

"I've answered 'Help Wanted' ads for five weeks, since I came out of school, and I have not been able to get even a trial. There are so many girls looking for positions of this kind."

"Yes, I know. But, gee," he added without attempt to conceal a note of admiration in his tone, "you shouldn't have any trouble. That is, I'd engage you if I could."

"Then you're different," she answered. "In most places I wait and wait and don't even see the man who engages the girls. In other places men ask all sorts of questions and they say they'll write and let me know, but they never do."

"Well, you'll get an audience here," the boy assured her. "You must stay right here. Mr. Scott is my stepfather and I became his partner to-day. He'll be back any minute and I'll introduce you."

"You're awfully—kind," she stammered. She smiled at him and young Scott felt that

he was the debtor. For the girl's part she was almost ready to burst into tears. Her reception here had been so extraordinarily different than elsewhere that she was unnerved.

The arrival of Jerrold Scott relieved her of further amenities.

"Hello, partner!" said the elder in greeting to the son. "On the job bright and early."

He caught sight of the girl.

"This young lady waiting to see me?"

"Yes," said the boy quickly. "She came in answer to your ad."

The importer glanced at Gertrude with renewed interest. Just the flicker of a smile showed at the corner of his lips. It was not the same frank, open-hearted smile as had come from the son and involuntarily the girl shuddered. Then even the semblance of cordiality subsided and the rather sensuous lips of the elder man were pressed together with an incongruous show of severity. There was a slight frown, too, as he asked briskly:

"How did you come in here, miss?"

"It was a mistake, sir. There was no one in the hall and I tried the wrong door. Then

your—Mr. Scott saw—me—and—told—me—to wait."

"Very well. But you will have to take your turn with the others. Just try that door across the corridor. I will send for you when I am ready."

As she rose to withdraw, crestfallen and apparently expectant of the same hopeless routine through which she had passed for weeks, young Scott moved as if to intercede, but the father raised a hand.

"I'm sorry, my boy, but business men can't play favorites," he cautioned with patronizing air. "Office discipline must be maintained strictly. With me it is almost a religion. Crane will question the young lady and if he finds her at all acceptable he will send her to me as he does the others. We mustn't interfere with subordinates in petty details of this kind. You must remember that, Jack. It is the keynote of success—placing minor responsibilities where they belong.

"Of course," he added, "I will have to cross-examine the candidate in this case after Crane

is through with her, for she is to be my private secretary, and selecting such an employee is a very delicate bit of business. You know how many I've had and how short a time they remain. It nearly drives me to distraction sometimes.

"But look, son; haven't you noticed anything?"

The elder man, with thumbs in vest pockets, straightened up and beamed, looking toward the door.

The boy pretended not to understand, so Scott strode to the door and threw it open, revealing in all its blatant pomposity the sign: "Scott & Son."

"Oh, governor," cried the boy, throwing his arms around his stepfather, "that's great! Am I really part of that?"

"You are indeed, my boy, and you shall have every opportunity to realize it from now on. That sign means a whole lot to you. It means wealth, but first of all it means work."

"That's what I want, dad," the youth exclaimed joyously. "And you'll never regret it."

"I don't think I ever shall, Jack. I wanted

to do it—wanted it myself. But especially is it a pleasure to me because it was your mother's wish. To-day is her birthday and that is my gift to her and to you."

The boy embraced the elder man again.

"You don't know how proud I am," he cried. "My own father couldn't have done more than that, could he?"

And that was the greatest boon to a stepfather's vanity that a son could have uttered.

Scott warmed under it and gloried in his own magnanimity.

"No, and it means business," he continued. "From now on we will share and share alike. I want you to grow into every branch of the work here. And you begin to-day. You'd better run along now, son, and talk to Emerson in the auditing department. He'll start you. It's up to you now to be a business man, so sail in."

"I will," Jack said sententiously. At the door he turned. "I say, governor, don't forget that little girl. I like her looks."

"So do I," agreed the elder after the door had closed.

CHAPTER III

WORK AT LAST!

WHEN his son had gone Scott again summoned his chief clerk.

"Crane, there was a girl in this office when I came in. Did you see her?"

"In here, sir? I don't believe I did, sir."

"Very well, go back to your desk. I'll attend to it myself."

He followed his employee out and opened the door to the room where a score or more young women were waiting. He pointed a signaling finger at Gertrude and with elated step the girl arose and followed him into the private office. She timorously approached a chair to which he motioned. It was beside his desk. Scott seated himself on the other side.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Gertrude Meyer."

"Where do you live?"

"2624 Second Avenue."

"Age?"

"Seventeen."

Scott's questions came in a curt, business-like tone. They were perfunctory. He was quite thoroughly convinced before he called her into his room that she would be given a trial in the serious responsibilities of private secretary to Jerrold Scott. Nevertheless, for her own peace of mind if not for his own, he continued to question her.

"Have you ever worked before?" he asked.

"No, sir."

She spoke these words in a low, fearsome voice. They had been the stumbling block many times in her quest for work and had usually brought conversations with prospective employers to a close. But she braced herself for the ordeal and stared at him with her big blue eyes wide open as she uttered her appeal.

"But I graduated from business college five weeks ago with high honors," she said. "They told me I was fitted to fill any stenographic position."

Scott passed this by for what it was worth.

"Do you live at home?" he asked.

"I live with my mother. She is a widow."

"You mean to support her?"

"When I can, yes. Mother has always supported me." She dropped her eyes as she finished haltingly: "Mother works—in a laundry. I have two younger brothers. They are in an orphan asylum."

The magnanimous man of affairs who was about to employ this unsophisticated girl as a private secretary noted the long lashes that hid the timorous eyes, the flushed cheeks and trembling hands and came quickly to her rescue.

"You are a brave little girl," he exclaimed. "You ought to learn rapidly and make a success in the business world with so much to urge you on; the need of comfort for a good mother and homeless brothers."

"I think I could, sir," she faltered, "if—if I could only get a start, even at a small salary."

"What would you consider the correct salary?"

She started and smiled at him through mist-filled eyes at the hope his words held out.

"I had hoped, sir," she said bravely, "to get six dollars a week."

"We'll make it ten."

She fairly leaped from the chair; then realizing the absurdness of her zeal before this austere man of business she dug her nails into her hands and tried to curb her excitement.

"Am I really employed!" she cried. "Can I really go to work?"

He smiled at her benignly.

"Yes, you can really go to work. There's a rack in the corner. You can hang your coat and hat there and start now."

"Oh, I thank you, sir," she said gratefully, and stood still staring at him as if it were a dream too good to be true. Then, following the direction of his eyes, she turned toward the hat rack.

"There's your desk and chair," Scott directed. "You'll find paper and pencils in the drawer. Now I'll tell my clerk to dismiss the other young ladies. Just make yourself at home."

She smiled graciously at him like a child

with a new-found toy. And he returned the look in kind.

He came back in a moment after instructing Crane to send away the score or more of competent stenographers that were waiting in the outer room. He walked briskly to his desk and took up some papers.

The new secretary glanced covertly at him from beneath her long lashes and pretended to be busying herself at the machine. But her head was in a whirl.

"I've got work—I've got work—I've got work!"

The words raced through her mind and down her very spine. They thrilled her and they startled her. She pinched herself to make sure that she was there. She felt the smooth surface of the polished mahogany to make sure that the desk was real. She took out a pad of paper for her notes. She wrote: I've got work; I've got work; I've got work.

Yes, it was true. The scrawling shorthand symbols proclaimed it so. She had a position! It was all true! Mother's hands would

come out of the washtub; Heinie and Rudie would come out of the orphan asylum. There was some justice in the world, now.

Her mental ejaculations were cut short by a knock at the door.

"Come in," Scott called. "Oh, hello, Stuart. You're just the man I wanted to see. I've got a little matter here that's urgent. Just a minute and I will be with you."

. . . . . .

George Stuart was personal attorney to Jerrold Scott. His services were of incalculable value; and to a man of Scott's temperamental instincts they were indispensable. He knew the urgency of the importer's communication with him now was not something that Scott wished to impart, but something that he, Stuart, must divulge. There had been a certain Miss Wilson whose abandonment of the duties of private secretary in this office had been rather precipitous. Stuart had been called upon to deal with her, as he had with others, and he had come to report.

The spider had become enmeshed in his own web and the fly had sailed merrily away

leaving a hum of impending disaster in her wake. It had required a tactful and forceful demonstration of the lawyer's talents to extricate the spider even temporarily, and having arrived fresh from the scene of the struggle, he looked askance at the demure and youthful successor at the typewriter.

What a blessing it would be, Stuart thought, if his friend could only be prevailed upon to eliminate temptation, or, at least, lessen it. There were so many perfectly good stenographers who would be excellent from one standpoint and impossible from another. "But what's the use," he mused; "geniuses like Scott are bound to be temperamental and he can afford a good fee."

The importer called his chief clerk again and made him beknown to the new secretary.

"You may take Miss Meyer through the general offices, Crane," he instructed. "It will be well for her to familiarize herself with our ways and you might prepare a list of our leading customers so she will have the names ready for reference. I will ring when I need her."

"Ring out the old, ring in the new," laughed the lawyer. "You're a good picker, Scott—sometimes."

The importer flushed, but he drew back his shoulders with feigned dignity.

"Your levity is of less account than your legal services, my dear Stuart. I will thank you to report concerning the one and dispense with the other. But don't let this girl worry you," he added in ameliorating tone. "She's as safe as an old maid."

"I never worry, Scott," returned the lawyer good-naturedly. "Not till something happens, at least. Then I do all the worrying."

"That's what you fellows are for, isn't it—to take the responsibilities of petty affairs off the minds of busy men?"

"Yes, in a way. But this case isn't so petty. Ten thousand dollars are the figures. A mere bagatelle to a millionaire, I suppose, at that."

"Not by a damn sight!" shouted the client. "I won't hear of it. It's blackmail—plain blackmail. You can drop the case, Stuart. I'll consult the district attorney."

Stuart smiled cynically and tolerantly.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you. The district attorney is a public official, you know, and affairs like this won't bear public scrutiny whether you're the sinner or the sinned against. Better steer away from the courts and the newspapers, Scott."

The importer sighed resignedly.

"All right," he agreed. "Have your way, or part of it. I'll tell you what I will do. I'll pay that Wilson girl $5,000 and not one cent more. She can take it or she can take her troubles to the court. And if I take mine there she'll go to jail. It's just a case of mutual bluff and the one with the biggest stack will win. Of course, I can't afford to have my name brought into the papers over such an affair and neither can she afford to take the chance of conviction for blackmail."

"I might convince the girl of that all right, Scott, but she's got a maiden aunt who seems to be just hankering for a bit of notoriety and the atmosphere of the jury box. I'll try again, however. By the way," he continued, indicating the seat that Gertrude Meyer had va-

cated, "has this new employee got a maiden aunt?"

"Oh, drop it, Stuart. Just because I've made one mistake is no reason why you should be continually bantering me about it. This little girl that I engaged to-day is only seventeen years old and she's under my protection. About the other one, I don't care a snap of my finger. It was her own fault. She encouraged it. Business life is full of that kind. They step in with their eyes open and then they shriek to high Heaven. You know, Stuart, I believe there are a lot of pretty little pirates running around from one job to another just hoping some man will try to hold their hand or something so they can trot into a courtroom and tell their tale of woe to a jury of shoe-clerks and ice-wagon drivers, the men who beat their wives at home but get gallant over some little working girl's sniffles and find a ten-thousand dollar verdict with a straight face, though they couldn't go out and earn a dime. I tell you the system's all wrong. The man always gets the worst of it—he hasn't any protection at all."

The lawyer heard this tirade through with an indulgent smile.

"You never should have been a business man, Scott," he ventured. "You ought to have been an actor. You spoke those lines just as though you actually believed them. It's a cruel world, I know, for men like you. Don't despair; I'll protect you. Only don't pick another under age. That makes it hard to handle. Now this one is a sensible looking—"

Scott's fist banged angrily on his desk.

"I asked you to leave her out of this—will you please? If she behaves she's as safe as in God's pocket."

"Oh, cut it yourself, Scott. She's as safe as in a den of lions. Your life is just one stenographer after another. You can't fool me any more than you can fool yourself. I'm off now to try to save you that $5,000. Take a bit of sound legal advice and drop the under age kind."

The importer and his attorney were cronies, in a way, outside of their business relations. But Scott smarted under Stuart's ver-

bal flagellation just the same. He was in no mood for further crossing when a knock at the door and his brusque "come in" brought Crane.

The clerk stood with clasped hands. He knew the importer's moods and knew at a glance he had picked an inopportune time for his mission. But he braved it out.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he purred obsequiously, "but she's quite incompetent."

"Who is?" Scott snapped.

"The new stenographer, sir."

"That's my affair. Is that all you have to say?"

"Yes, sir—but—but she cannot take the simplest dictation."

"I'll teach her. She's a smart, willing girl."

"But, sir, I have taken the liberty—there were some reports that had to be copied—and —there was one woman—an excellent one, sir, who didn't get a hearing. You were busy with Mr. Stuart so I took it on myself to let her go ahead with the work."

"Oh, you did, did you," purred Scott in

mockery of his humble aid. "Well, you can just run right along and stop her. Who's hiring the help here, you or I? You didn't let that other girl go?" he finished fiercely

"No . . . sir. She's waiting. Her coat and hat were in here."

"Yes, and they're going to stay in here. Send the girl in."

. . . . . .

Scott ran through the pile of letters on his big flat top desk and selected one.

"We're ready for business, Miss Meyer," he announced as she entered. "Better bring a chair up here. You'll get the dictation better."

She took the pad and pencil from her desk and approached him with a troubled face and inward quaking. The importer continued glancing over the contents of the letter, oblivious of her confusion.

He began: "Messrs. Barton and Barton, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Gentlemen: My personal attention has been directed to the fact that you still continue to charge us duties on all shipments of furs. This is contrary . . ."

He glanced up and stopped short. The new stenographer was not writing at all, but with perplexed mien and misty eyes she was biting nervously at the end of her pencil, ready at the slightest advance of expected remonstrance to burst into tears. Scott forestalled disaster.

"What's the matter, am I running away from you?" he asked kindly.

"Just a little, sir." She plucked up new courage. "I'll be all right after a while. It's so strange . . . to me . . . 'You continue' . . ."

With phenomenal patience for a man of his parts Scott repeated, this time slowly and deliberately: "You continue to charge us duty on all fur shipments. This is contrary to our arrangement, as I distinctly stipulated that prices quoted did not include tariff charges. Unless I receive remittance immediately I shall consider our business at an end. I mean this and will not tolerate any further equivocation. . . ."

With surprising temerity, she interrupted:

"I'm afraid I didn't understand that last word."

Scott looked helpless, but he smiled.

"Well, you can put it this way, then." He continued: "I mean this and I will not tolerate any further monkey-business. I guess they'll understand that," he added humorously, "it's international. Close the letter with 'Yours very truly.' Oh, by the way, you might add this: 'You will note that I have taken my foster son into partnership and that our firm will henceforth be known as Scott & Son. Very truly yours."

The telephone rang.

"That's all for the present, Miss Meyer," he said as he lifted the receiver.

The call was about a luncheon engagement. "You can write that letter out and I will sign it when I come back," he told her, and went out.

In a moment he was back. He walked toward her quietly and paused, looking over her shoulder. She was puzzling over the notes.

"Well, how goes it?" he inquired.

She looked up with a brave attempt at a smile.

"I guess . . . I'll get . . . it . . . all right. . . . I'm a little nervous."

"Oh, you mustn't act that way," he cautioned meekly. "I'm a very patient man. You'll get on all right, but you mustn't be afraid to tell me if you lose your way."

He leaned over her shoulder. His face was very close to hers. He breathed very quick and short. Then he drew back almost with a start.

"I can't wait now," he said quietly, "but I'll be back in an hour or so and if you haven't got it straight by then, I'll go over it with you."

"Thank you, sir," she answered with a relieving sigh. "You are very kind."

"Not at all. I know you'll be all right. Just be patient yourself and persevering."

. . . . . .

Gertrude was still laboring over her notes when a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of young Scott, interrupted her. He beamed on her with surprise and genuine pleasure at her success.

"Well, well, here we are on the job. Now

I guess your troubles are all over, aren't they?"

"No," she answered, smiling, "I'm afraid they're just beginning."

"Why?" he inquired solicitously, "what's the matter now?"

"Oh, I'm all confused. Mr. Scott gave me a letter and he dictated it slowly. I ought to be able to read it all right, but my head is just spinning. . . ."

"Oh, don't worry," he interrupted, encouragingly. "You'll get over that. Just take it easy. You'll get along here. Dad's a regular hummer, but he knows how to make allowances, too. Just perk up and imagine you're only writing a letter at school."

He came over and looked down at her notes.

"I wish I could read shorthand. I'd like to help you out. Wait a minute," he exclaimed suddenly with the burst of an idea. "Just read to me. I am pretty familiar with some of the business and I can probably guess what the governor meant if you can give me the clew. Come, we'll get along."

"I'm sure we will," she assented; "you're so

kind. Let me see. Where was I? Oh, yes. Tell me first, are there two r's in tariff?"

"No, one. Do you know what the word means?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, no wonder. It's a pretty big word. It elected a few presidents and retired a few senators. But we'll fathom it. What comes next?"

"Oh, I know that," she cried with babyish enthusiasm—" 'charges.' Then, 'This is contrary to our arrangement, as I . . . distinctly . . .'"

She stopped and took another cropper, but they finally wormed the word out. It was "stipulated." With much questioning and puzzling and coöperation the text of the letter was completed.

"Do you put a comma between 'yours truly'?" she asked innocently.

"Well, that depends, Miss Meyer, on who you're addressing it to."

He struck an attitude with folded arms and serious mien.

"Now, if I were to say to you, 'I'm yours

. . . truly' I think I would put an exclamation point after each word."

The frivolousness of this escaped her, or she pretended it did.

"But oh," she answered coyly, "this is to somebody in Halifax."

"Then I wouldn't use the comma," he advised. "There's probably a tariff on commas, too."

"I'm afraid you're laughing at me," she observed this time. "I don't know what's the matter, but I just can't get my brain to working to-day."

"I'm affected the same way. You'll get over yours, I guess."

"And you?"

"I don't know. I'm afraid not. . . . I hope not."

CHAPTER IV

A VISION IN BLUE SERGE

THE Jerrold Scotts moved within the inner circle. Their home in Fifth Avenue was as spacious and as pretentious as the home of a rich New Yorker should be. It had always held its place as the scene of ceremonious hospitality, but this winter it was enlivened by the presence of young folk.

Jack's return from Harvard had been simultaneous with his sister's completion of her course at a young woman's boarding school. But seventeen and not yet arrived at that period of adolescence essential for formal launching into the social swirl, Josephine Scott was enjoying that most delightful hiatus in fashionable girlhood—the time when one shares all the privileges of society without assuming its cares.

In the late winter or early spring there would come the inevitable trip across the wa-

ter, the finishing touches in Berlin, Paris and the Riviera, a summer at Bar Harbor or Newport, and then this young child of fortune would blossom out as a bona fide member of the fraternity which toils not but is arrayed in goldspun. Débutante or no débutante, Josephine didn't lack for attention from the gallants. The Scott millions, or that part of them which would fall to the girl, were in jeopardy through this forthcoming trip to Europe. The prospectors came often and under any pretext; as Jack's friends or hers, to pave the way to paternal esteem.

Scott surveyed them all with placid, but watchful eye. They were mostly youngsters of Jack's age, and so far he had detected nothing to arouse his serious concern. But he was on the lookout. Josephine meant more to her father than his millions. Yet he shared with her mother fond, vague hopes of some prodigious match. There was nothing to thwart these expectations. He knew his daughter was a beautiful girl, bringing from her mother a legacy of name and a fortune which he would triple when the time came.

This man, who in the outer world was the gray wolf regarding women of a lower strata as his rightful prey, or toys, as the case might be, became, within the sanctum of his own domicile, the guardian mastiff jealous and zealous of his own progeny. Other men's daughters were one thing, his was another.

The importer was enjoying the quiet of his library before the dinner hour when Josephine burst in upon him.

"Hello, daddy," she cried, as she came running to him. She pressed glowing cheeks, that motoring in the brisk November air had turned almost to carmine, to his. Strands of her disheveled hair floated across his face. Something of the thrill of her went through him—some alien realization of the exquisiteness of her; the sense that she had passed from childhood and what she might mean to some man. It was a strange thought—spontaneous, but frightening, so that he drew her to him with more than usual ardor in his embrace. Her next words confirmed the truth of his intuition.

"Oh, daddy, I've had a perfectly glorious

afternoon. We motored out to the country club and you can't imagine how grand it was."

"We?" he echoed. "You mean your mother—"

"No," she interrupted, "Paul Montgomery and I. It was a young folks' affair, and besides, mother had a meeting of her benevolent society."

"But you had a chaperone, Joe," he suggested.

"At the club, of course, but not going or coming. Very few of the girls did, dad. It was just an informal affair . . . a tango tea."

"Dancing?"

"Oh, surely, goosey. That's what it was all about. But the trip was the best part of it. It's simply wonderful in the country now. You ought to get away from that office grind and run over yourself now and then. There were nearly fifty players on the links to-day."

She ruffled his hair and pulled his nose in the childish way that so endeared her to him, and he stroked her shining, golden tresses. But for all her sweetness and cajolery Scott was troubled.

"Joe," he said softly, "now don't think I'm old fashioned and cranky. I want you to have a good time; just as good a time as any girl in New York, but I don't think it's just exactly the right thing for girls of your age to take twenty-mile rides alone with young men. You might have called Jack up and asked him. I'd rather you would; won't you, dear—after this?"

"Why, dad! Take brother away from his work on his first day in the firm? He wouldn't have gone if I had asked him."

"Yes, he would. I'd have sent him. I don't approve of it, Joe. I know lots of girls do it, but I want you to be different. You've got only a little time left, anyway. You'll be 'coming out' next year and then goodness knows what will become of you. I suppose I'll see you for an hour or so at dinner, and maybe a while on Sundays. And first thing you know some fellow'll be coming along to take you on the longest trip of all. So while I've got you I want you to be just a little girl as you've always been. Tango teas and dinners and the opera are necessary evils for your

kind, I suppose, but for the time being, Joe, let's have Jack or mother or a chaperone in on them, too."

She slid down from his lap and kissed him.

"All right, daddy," she agreed. "But you *are* old fashioned and just horrid to ask it. Why, Paul is one of the nicest boys in the world, and mamma will confirm it. Where on earth did you get such notions? This isn't the first time I have been out to the club with him."

"I know it, Joe," was all he answered. Telling where he got the notions would be telling tales. His prejudices wouldn't bear a very close analysis. There was something of a chasm between Scott's theories about girls and his every-day demonstration of them. But he had won his point for the moment and he was satisfied.

"Now don't talk about this at supper, Joe," he finished, "just do it for me."

She kissed him again and ran to dress.

The dinner passed without recurrence to the subject.

Jack was glowing with enthusiasm over his

first day in the office and talked glibly. And that was the chief topic of interest to his mother. It was the day of days for her. The partnership seemed to weld the bonds between them tighter. Scott & Son. She liked the fatherly sound of it and she reveled in it as it came from the lips of her husband and her boy.

"It's a good name, dad," he said. "We'll have to keep it up and hand it down to New York as an established institution, won't we?"

"That's rather up to you, my boy, I should say." Scott laughed and looked over at his wife. "I've done my part."

"You have indeed, Jerrold," she answered, "and Jack will never let you regret it. Will you, my boy?"

"No . . . surely not," he said, after a pause. Something in his stepfather's words had turned his chain of thought into an alien channel. "It's up to you," he repeated to himself, and with this mental admonition there came quite involuntarily a vision of youthful loveliness—blue eyes, brown hair, a girlish figure not unlike that of his sister's before

him. But the inanimate embellishments were —oh, so different. Just a plain, serge dress instead of silks and satins, and the environment for this picture was utilitarian, not merely picturesque.

The soft rays of inverted lights shown on the snowy linen, the silver and fine crystal; it illumined the exquisite faces of his mother and Josephine; radiant, joyous faces, marked by the delicate lines of good breeding; unmarked by a single line of care. Here were creatures of fortune. He loved them. He was part of them and of theirs. But somehow this other picture thrust itself upon him. Blue eyes, brown hair, blue serge. It lost nothing by comparison.

The vision took form and life. He heard a silvery chain of words: "I'm afraid you're laughing at me. . . . I don't know what's the matter. . . . I just can't get my brain to working to-day." And he answered: "I'm affected the same way. You'll get over yours, I guess." And then the muted bell: "And you?" His answer came as it had come before: "I don't know. . . . I'm afraid not. . . . *I hope not.*"

In complete absorption and surrender to his thoughts he spoke the last three words out loud. The mind travels apace. Jack's divergence into dreamland had probably claimed fifty seconds from the conversation. So the listeners pieced his words together: "No, surely not. I hope not." And his mother added, "I know he won't."

CHAPTER V

PAY DAY

AT a more humble board in the squalid Second Avenue tenement the material vision in blue was as happy at this hour as young Scott and his mother. So was Mrs. Meyer, for Gertrude's homecoming that night brought joy unconfined. The long days of almost hopeless waiting and the wearisome, sleepless nights were at an end.

The brave widow had toiled constantly in her effort to keep her daughter at the business college, and at the same time provide sustenance for her boys. She had wept for joy the day Gertrude returned with the much coveted diploma. The crisp, linen paper embossed with the symbols of efficiency, the red seal and the flourishing signature of the school's president—all seemed such an officious reality. It seemed as if all the recipient had to do was to

flaunt this document in the face of an employer. He must needs succumb to its imperative testimonial, as would a bank president to the recommendation of a senator. But as the days passed the illusion of its latent power waned.

"Did you show the diploma?" Mrs. Meyer would inquire when Gertrude returned after a day of futile search.

"Yes, mother, but most of them won't even look at it. It's experience they want. I tell them the instructors said I was competent to fill a position, but none of them want to take a new girl."

The widow's dejection at such reports had urged the daughter to renewed efforts, and though she had begun to lose hope herself Gertrude had gone on day after day. At night she had her mother read to her from the newspapers while she struggled with the dictation to retain what she had learned. But this was a difficult performance. The widow's use of English in the spoken form was a jumbled and idiomatic jargon, and in reading and writing it she was hopelessly deficient. . . .

Now all the bitter disappointment and suspense was over. Gertrude had work!

"Just think, mother," the girl exclaimed after she had made the joyful tidings known, "you can give up your position at the laundry and with the extra work you have been taking in we can get along fine. You must tell them to-morrow and just as soon as you can get away we will bring Heine and Rudie home. They'll have good food and plenty of it. And no more suppers of dry bread and beer for you. We'll have beef stew and lots of 'kraut every night. You won't have to work after supper, either. Just sit and sew for the boys—and for us, too. I'm going to give you a nice surprise the first pay day; see if I don't."

"You're a smart girl, Gertie, and a goot one," the mother declared. "Dot's what I always thought, you would succeed. But it got mighty glum with me. Every day carfare and carfare and no job. But now we'll be happy. Oh, I just want to write by dot asylum man to-night and tell him Heine and Rudie are to leave it. Every night I want dem with me and I cry. But now, no more.

You're a goot Gertie. But the place—what is it? Tell me more about it, Gertie." She realized suddenly that in contemplation of forthcoming luxury they had not gone very far into the details of its source.

The question recalled to Gertie the realities and difficulties. The misgivings as to her own ability to hold the position had been banished by the enthusiasm of the moment. Besides, she could not bear to put a damper on her mother's happiness. She was influenced, too, by memory of the kindness and toleration of her employer and his son. With such encouragement she was bound to succeed, she reasoned, so she relegated doubts that had unnerved her during the day.

"Oh, the place is perfectly grand, mamma," she exclaimed. "Such a fine firm, and Mr. Scott is as nice as he can be. He's awfully rich, too. You should see the office. My desk and chair are real mahogany like all the rest of the furniture and there's a thick, soft carpet like rich people have in their parlors. I'm glad now they didn't take me at those other places. I haven't been asking but six

dollars and some of the men, if they talked at all, said they wouldn't pay a beginner over three or four. But Mr. Scott nearly doubled what I asked.

"He's a good man, I know, mamma, for after he had engaged me he hired another stenographer and he just made a place for her because she was a poor widow with three children to support. He was angry with Mr. Crane—that's his clerk—because she nearly got away before he learned the circumstances. She asked for ten dollars and he gave her twelve; and he hired her for one of his men who had never had a stenographer before. 'Put her in Waldo's department,' he told Crane. 'His writing is so bad I can't read it. I'd rather pay the difference and have his reports typewritten.'

"But I know he employed Mrs. Smalley—that's her name—just because she needed work."

Mrs. Meyer listened to this recital of the importer's merits with rapt attention. It was almost unbelievable to her that there could be such unselfish magnanimity among the rich.

She had never encountered it herself. Even during the lifetime of her husband she had known nothing but struggle and poverty; Meyer's protests and laments had almost convinced her that a poor man was lucky to live at all. The rich had everything and the poor nothing, he had told her, and it was the same in this country as in any other.

She had been rather a cheerful, optimistic sort so long as they had enough of the bare necessities, but when he died and left her penniless with the support of herself, their little girl and the two babies entirely on her own shoulders, she had encountered the cold reality and had come to know her husband's complaint was no idle grumbling against fate.

That is the bitter lesson of millions. Mrs. Meyer's prejudice against the rich was not founded on narrow jealousy of their possessions, but on the certain knowledge that their tenacious holding of them left her with nothing. She had come to believe that the classes were of another world bent on ridding that world of such as her. Now her theories, while not dispersed, had been rudely shat-

tered. At least, Scott, she figured, must be a remarkable exception to the rule. She pondered and nodded over this new order of things, but facts demanded surrender to forced credulity.

"Yes, he must be a very goot man," she agreed finally. "You are lucky, Gertie, that you found him."

. . . . . .

News of the Meyers' windfall soon spread into darkest corners of the tenement. The widow's extraordinary efforts and sacrifices made in behalf of Gertrude's modern education had been subjects of much concern and comment among the neighbors. Mostly they had been inclined to criticise, especially when Heine and Rudie had been bundled off to the asylum.

"It will come to no goot," was the verdict of Mrs. Schmidt, whose own daughter, just a year older than Gertrude, helped to fill the family coffer by working ten hours a day in the laundry with Mrs. Meyer. "She will kill herself, that woman and for what?" Mrs. Schmidt had demanded of a concurring spirit.

"My girl is just as goot as her Gertie, but she is not too goot to work like the rest of us. And those boys, it is a shame; at the asylum with a lot of kits that never had no fadders and with mudders what don't want them. It is no goot, I say, and I know it."

Such adverse opinions found their way to Mrs. Meyer, but with Teutonic stubbornness she had waived them aside and persisted in her course. And now the reward of her perseverance had come. They wouldn't talk much now; they would be doing what she had done.

. . . . . .

The week passed slowly for Gertrude. She worried not a little over her palpable inefficiency, but Scott was very tolerant and kind. He went over the letters after she had written them and made corrections, and with this assistance she was able to progress.

At last Saturday night came and with it her first pay. Crane handed her an order on the cashier and she received two crisp five dollar bills.

What epoch in our life eclipses this, the moment that we approach a paying teller's win-

dow to draw the first money that is really all our own—that we have earned? We stand before the little cage hoisted high on the pedestal of self esteem. The blood flows faster, the eye is brighter and the hand is ready with a sort of nervous eagerness for the fruits of our toil. Greed is not the incentive; it's the sense of possessing that which is ours; the realization that we have become a power of some sort in the great game of give and take. It is a sensation quite unlike any other we ever experience.

So, Gertrude thrilled at the sight of these notes and the thought of what they meant; they stood for so much! They meant a good supper for her mother, a new dress; and, more than these material things, they meant a brightening of that poor mother's spirit; they meant compensation for her long hours of toil and sacrifice; tangible reward for ceaseless effort and love.

The girl took the money and hurried down into the street. She pushed her way through the scurrying crowds west from Broadway to one of those larger emporiums of trade where

such a sum as hers is a respected asset. She found a counter where the cheapest kind of dress goods were sold. She couldn't spend much, she knew, but she wanted some token of love for the mother; something besides the bare cash which, goodness knows, would be welcome enough in itself.

She selected some brown calico, and this, with the necessary trappings to complete the dress, took three dollars. She went then to the top floor of the big store, where every Saturday there were offered prodigious bargains in foodstuffs. She bought meat, groceries they were in actual need of and indulged further in some inexpensive knicknacks such as a girl would choose. This taxed the remaining capacity of one of the bills.

The purchases made a heavy parcel, but Gertrude could not forego the exciting pleasure of surprising her mother with them at once, so she declined the proffered offer of delivery, and trudged out with the bundle. It seemed like the load of the Pilgrim before she reached her home, but the reward was ample.

Together they removed the wrappings and

while Gertrude laughed for joy at her mother's delight, the good widow's eyes filled at sight of this incomparable plenty. The girl maneuvered so that the package containing the dress was the last to be opened.

"Oh, my Gertie," exclaimed the widow, as the folds of calico were spread before her, "you are an angel, what? A dress for your mother before you buy one for yourself! What will Mrs. Schmidt and Mrs. Baumgarten say now? High notions they said the school would give you. Notions, is it; well, I wish all schools will teach them. But it's not the school; it's just my Gertie."

They prepared the supper which, to Mrs. Meyer and the girl, too, for that matter, was a feast of plenty. That night the mother had the best sleep she had known for months. She dreamed of the homecoming of her boys; of defiance to exacting bosses at the laundry; of subdued neighbors and of an omnipotent daughter who wrote strange cryptographic figures that seemed like rows of dollar signs.

In the morning a part of the dream became reality. As soon as they had breakfasted, Ger-

trude and her mother set off for the asylum where the authorities, having been forewarned, were prepared to deliver Heine and Rudie to their kin.

But at giving up her work in the laundry Mrs. Meyer demurred. True, with her daughter's ten dollars and such aid as she could give by working at home, they would have enough to live in comfort, but her better judgment told her it was well to wait till Gertrude was established. Besides, something in her rebelled against being dependent on her girl.

Sunday was a day of unalloyed happiness in the humble Meyer home. Her power to help and the good she had already accomplished buoyed Gertrude up so that she relegated all misgivings about her ability at the office and went back to work the next day with a light heart.

CHAPTER VI

CARESSES AND COUNSEL

SCOTT greeted his young stenographer with a cheery smile.

"We've got a lot to do this morning, little secretary. But don't be frightened. You're coming along beautifully."

He dictated half a dozen short business letters which she took down moderately well. The week's practice had familiarized her with terms the importer used regularly and had made her comparatively efficient in this correspondence.

"Now just hold those letters for awhile," he instructed, "and write this one first."

He plunged into a protracted communication to an old acquaintance. It was partly business, but was interspersed with passages of a personal nature that called forth all sorts of colloquialisms, golf and yachting terms and

what not, which she had never heard. Scott dictated rapidly, forgetting her shortcomings. She had lost her way once or twice, but struggled on.

When he had finished dictating the importer took up a report from his Paris agent. It revealed what appeared to him exceedingly bad judgment in matters involving thousands and he was in a testy humor when Gertrude laid the typed letter on his desk. She walked back and waited in trepidation. Scott took up the typewritten page. His expression of annoyance gave way to one of amusement and ended in a grin.

"Well, you *are* an original correspondent!" he exclaimed. "About half of this is what I said, and the rest—what I can read of it—" He broke off in a laugh. "What's this? I said my *foster* son; not *faster*. Jack's one boy that a college education and a good drawing account didn't make fast. Though he's not so slow, at that," he added. "But you had that in a letter the other day. Should think you'd remember that."

"I . . . I'm afraid I made a botch of the

letter," she said feebly. She started toward him and burst into tears.

The importer was at her side in an instant. He placed an arm gently across her shoulders.

"Now, you mustn't do that, little secretary —cry, I mean. This letter was hard, I know. Come, let's straighten it out." He removed his arm and took her hand, leading her to her desk.

A tear slipped down her cheek as she lifted trusting eyes to his. He was so very good and kind, this man who was a power and who could have hired a million stenographers more competent than she!

As for Scott, something in her childlike innocence must have impressed even his rakish brain for he released her hand and stood looking down at her. The little chivalry there was left in him stirred. To men the distress of some women is only an irritation. But there are others whose grief enhances their magnetism. Sympathy is closely akin to more material passion. The young girl at Scott's side was beautiful. The momentary impulse of genuine tenderness passed; the roue in him

asserted itself. He placed his arm about her again; this time with more fervor.

"Come, little girl," he said softly as he bent down till his face almost touched hers, "forgive me for being cross, or frightening you." With his free hand he stroked her hair as he had stroked the tresses of his daughter. "Come, you'll get along all right; we'll get along all right together; only, don't cry. Let's fix up the letter!"

The click of the door cut short Scott's caresses. He straightened up and stepped back. Catherine Wiggins, the stenographer who lived at the Y. W. C. A. and who had been retained on the counsel of the persistent Crane, was walking right into the private office.

"I beg your pardon, miss," said the importer severely; "the entrance is three doors below. This is a private door."

She answered with an ingenuous smile. She was quite unawed and her contumely was disconcerting.

"I know, Mr. Scott," she said artlessly, "but my mission is private. I wanted to ask you about that night work. You know you spoke

of it last week and I'm very eager to do something extra if I can. Mr. Crane hasn't given me anything of that kind."

Scott's poise had returned. "Oh, yes, Miss Higgins," he answered suavely, "I recall our talk. I'll speak to Crane about it. He tells me you are A No. 1."

"Thank you, sir; but it's Wiggins, not Higgins, if you please."

The millionaire smiled in spite of himself. There was something so human about this young woman that it precluded one's being roiled by her. Being contradicted and corrected by a pretty girl amused him, too, and Miss Wiggins had a way of doing it parenthetically that made him like her. He was relieved of further amenities, however, by the entrance of his cashier.

"Mr. Swanson of the Fourth National is here," this subordinate announced. "He'd like to see you. Shall I show him in?"

"No, I'll come out," Scott answered. At the door he turned for a final word to the irrepressible Miss Wiggins.

"I'll speak to Crane about that at once," he

volunteered. "You might help Miss Meyer until I return."

Catherine had advanced to Gertrude's desk. As the millionaire passed out she caught sight of the letter that had brought the tears and unheeded caresses. From the letter she glanced to the little secretary's troubled face and then to the door through which Scott had vanished. A childhood chorus popping into her head, she whistled softly: "For she's a Young Thing and Cannot Leave her Mother."

The whistle broke into a smile and she said very gently:

"You write the Munson system?"

"Yes . . . but I can't always read it."

"You poor little kid!"

That was all, but it had a world of meaning. The note of sympathy didn't exactly strike a respondent chord with the private secretary.

"I was getting along all right," she said with a little show of spirit, "but this letter was so long and had so many funny words and Mr. Scott dictated so fast that I got confused."

The older girl ignored this attempt at extenuation and motioned Gertrude out of the

chair. She slipped a letter head in the typewriter and began copying the secretary's notes. Between questions as to the meaning of this circle and that dash, Miss Wiggins found time to learn that Gertrude was only seventeen years old and had told her employer about Heine and Rudie and her mother. She learned, too of the brown calico dress that Gertrude had bought for her mother, and of prospects of some further luxuries on the forthcoming pay day.

The letter finished, Catherine crumpled up the secretary's sorry copy and drew out the faultless sheet. She arose and placing a hand on the younger girl's shoulder shot out this astonishing question:

"Has the old reprobate asked you out to lunch yet?" She stared straight into Gertrude's eyes as if she was sighting a pistol.

"To lunch!" said the startled girl. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Has he?"

The amazed look; the guilelessness of this unsophisticated little creature reassured her.

"Well, he's going a little slow with you," she

continued calmly. "But he will ask you; and when he does, don't go."

"I don't . . . understand . . . you," came the faltering answer. "You . . . must . . . be . . . mistaken . . ."

"No, I'm not mistaken. Those things never sound right when they're told. You'll find them out in time, and I hope, without regrets. Mr. Scott might let you get by for the first week, but he won't hold off very long. He's very clever, I guess. But, girlie, when he starts it you stop him. Hasn't he been *extremely* kind . . . I mean, affectionately so?"

"Why, yes, he's been kind. He's one of the most patient men I ever saw."

The secretary felt a rising resentment and from mere denial progressed to a defense.

"I don't see why you talk that way about Mr. Scott. Has he invited *you* to lunch?"

"No, he hasn't, child. He knows better. We sort of understand each other. But what's the use," she said resignedly; then, impetuously; "What's the matter, are you blind? Patience! Kindness! I know how he is kind to you. Puts his hand on your shoulder in a

fatherly way; tells you you are a brave, little girl . . . in a *fatherly* way. Say, tell me," she commanded, "how much salary is he paying you?"

"Ten dollars."

Miss Wiggins pointed contemptuously to the crumpled paper in the basket.

"For that?"

She took Gertrude's hand and held her again with the courageous sincerity of her stare.

"Look out, girlie; look out! I hadn't talked to that old Romeo two minutes before I knew what he was after. I know his kind. That sort of man wouldn't put up with an incompetent stenographer for an hour; if that poor old bookkeeper made one mistake he would chuck him out of the window. When he hires a new girl, a young one and a pretty one like you, and pays more than the market price, and puts you in his private office where he doesn't want outsiders to peep in . . . he doesn't want a stenographer."

"What does he want?"

"A playmate!"

The young secretary stepped back. Her

look of resentment and defiance was unconcealed.

"I don't believe you," she said spiritedly. "You misjudge Mr. Scott . . . you must; and if I felt as you do about him, I wouldn't work for him."

"All right, girlie. You're only a child; but even a girl of seventeen ought to know *something.* And I don't think you're lying to me, or I wouldn't talk to you.

"Here," she said authoritatively, "give me that pencil. I'll show you something they don't teach you in college, but it should be part of the female instinct."

She wrote a quick scrawl on the pad.

"You can't read your own shorthand; maybe, you can read mine. What does that say?"

"Stop."

"Yes, *stop!* That's the word. Keep it on the tip of your tongue. You'll need it. Say, let me give you a little tip. You're in a new world now. You'll meet a lot of men of the kind you have never met before . . . men who *do* things and *are* things . . . men who don't

have to wait till Saturday night for their income and their holidays. They'll hypnotize you with their forcefulness. Then they'll tell you you're beautiful and your little head will spin at the consciousness that little *you* has been noticed by such giants. They'll rave about your lips and your eyes and your hair till you'll wonder why nobody ever found out before that you were so lovely. They'll get you drunk . . . not necessarily with wine but with hopes and promises and dreams and new sensations. They'll have so much to give you and you'll have so little to return . . . and nobody . . . not even a girl, likes to be a bad sport."

The force and bitterness of this poignant homily impressed even the innocent secretary.

"Please," she said, drawing back,—"please don't talk like that; you frighten me."

"I only wish I *could* frighten you. The tragedy usually is that you can't bring a girl to her senses before it's too late."

"But in this case I don't think the warning is called for. Even if Mr. Scott was the kind of man you believe he is he wouldn't think of such things here. He's rich and important

. . . besides, he has a wife and family . . . he wouldn't dare . . ."

"Dare!" the older girl interrupted, "why he'll dare anything. His kind will lie and act and smile and tell you their wives don't understand them. They wrote the system and they can play it safe. While they're looking into your eyes they're framing an alibi in their heads. They fight and swindle each other, these *business* men, and a child like you is . . . well, just a child. It's the salt in their busy lives; it's the gambling fascination; it's the lure of the hunt. They see you, they want you, they take you and they . . . drop you."

Youth is a wonderful antidote for cynicism just as experience is the forerunner of disillusionment. Gertrude was aroused; shocked; alarmed; but she had yet to lose the faith and credulity that is a girl's heritage and her peril. Hard knocks on the gridiron of life had jostled Catherine Wiggins to the side lines where she stood and viewed the conflict from a true perspective. But Gertrude had just entered the fray.

"What would you have me do," she chal-

lenged, "run away from a fine position, with more salary than I ever expected, just because you *think* Mr. Scott isn't a good man?"

The counselor threw up her hands with a gesture of despair. "Again, what's the use?" she exclaimed. "You'll learn; they all do, only don't go to . . ."

"And he promised he would teach me," the younger girl went on as if she had not heard, "and help me and make me a useful correspondent . . ."

"He probably will . . . in a divorce case," was Miss Wiggins' sententious comment. And she was gone.

* * * * * * *

CHAPTER VII

AND IT CAME TO PASS

GERTRUDE'S thoughts were whirling. She felt rebellious and yet was strangely moved by the prophetic denouement of the older stenographer. She put her elbows on her desk and pressed her hands to throbbing temples. Was it true, this augury of pitfalls and persecution in the business world? Something answered "yes," but she squelched the voice of admonition and waived the omen back. "I won't believe it," she cried. "Thousands of girls work and nothing . . . nothing ever happens to them."

But Miss Wiggins' trenchant words of warning wouldn't down. The secretary looked toward the waste basket and heard again the voice of warning: "He pays you ten dollars for that! . . . Look out, girlie! Look out!"

The logic of it rang true and the fulfillment of the prophecy was not far off.

She took up the letter Miss Wiggins had transcribed and studied it. Then she resumed her writing of the routine dictation and kept at it until one o'clock when Scott returned from his conference.

"Not gone to lunch yet, Miss Meyer?" was his solicitous word.

"No," she answered simply and walked over with Miss Wiggins' letter and laid it on his desk.

"Run along, then," he told her, "and" . . . looking at his watch . . . "you needn't be back until two-thirty."

He picked up the letter casually and broke into an illumining smile.

"Why, this is perfect!" he exclaimed. He wheeled in his chair in time to catch Gertrude's half guilty flush of pleasure.

"Miss Wiggins helped me with it . . . just a little," she admitted, "but I think I'm learning rapidly now."

She made no move to leave and Scott looked up.

"Why don't you go to your luncheon?" he asked.

Her answer came in embarassed tone: "I . . . wasn't going to lunch . . . to-day."

"Not going to *lunch?* Why, you can't work all day without eating!"

"I know," she said timidly, "but I forgot my money to-day. One of the boys was sick this morning and mother and I had a time with him. In the hurry I came away without a cent. I got to the elevated before I thought of it and didn't even go back for carfare. That's what made me a few minutes late, this morning, Mr. Scott. I'm sorry."

The millionaire stood up and took out a roll of bills. He had peeled off one and was holding it out to her when he stopped and said quite unconcernedly:

"Why not go to lunch with me?"

He spoke in such a matter of fact way that she might never have realized the incongruity of a millionaire employer asking his ten dollar a week stenographer to dine with him. But the image of a pretty face, set tense in its serious appeal thrust itself between her and the importer.

"Look out, girlie; look out!" the image

seemed to say. The room swam before the young secretary's eyes. But she realized that Scott was waiting for an answer and murmured faintly:

"Oh, I don't think I'd better . . . do that. I can . . . manage . . . somehow."

"Nonsense! You have to *eat.* Why not with me? I'm ready now."

"I'd rather . . . not. That is," she countered timorously, "I don't believe . . . I ought . . . to . . ."

"What, in broad daylight! In a public restaurant? Why certainly you should go, if you want to and I want to take you. Come."

"Oh, no . . . please," she pleaded. "I've never eaten in big restaurants. . . . I wouldn't know how to act."

"We'll go to a nice quiet one, then," he persisted. He moved toward her and involuntarily she retreated.

"Come, little secretary," he urged, "are you afraid of me? Surely you have no reason to be. Now that I think of it," he added lightly, "a little luncheon will be the very thing. I want you to tell me more of your mother and

your little brothers and we'll have a chance to talk of personal things . . . so many things that one can't discuss in an office where there's nothing but business and so many interruptions."

Patience; wonderful patience! Kindness! the very acme of it! And such *fatherly* solicitude! Go it, Scott; you know the game and play it well! But it's an uphill battle this time. Someone has mixed the deal. You courted prodigious odds when you kept that Wiggins girl!

The little secretary, trapped and cornered became suddenly inspired. She found an egress from the cul de sac.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "you've forgotten. You have a luncheon engagement, already. Don't you remember? You made one over the 'phone this morning."

"Not important," said Scott, unruffled. "I didn't intend to keep it, anyway. More business. I don't like to talk business with my meals. I want you to see this little place I have in mind. It's Kahn's. There's a French cook

there who can turn an oyster into a confection. Now, we'll just go and have a quiet little luncheon and a heart-to-heart talk. You'll tell me all about yourself and I'll give you some good, sound advice. Then we'll understand each other. We'll be good friends . . . and I'll be able to help you."

She looked at him in mute appeal. She was like a fledgling whose last hour of trusting dependency had come. She saw, or felt somehow that behind this big man's suave cajolery there was a latent insistence . . . a demand; a sort of "do as I ask, or take the consequences." Should she make the plunge, trusting in her own untried strength and fortitude, or should she brave his displeasure and jeopardize her new found fortune?

He seemed to read her mind, this man who knew the game, for while his voice was as soft and persuasive as before his words were more menacing.

"Come, little secretary," he said, advancing quite close to her, "come; you're not going to refuse me the first little thing I ever asked of

you, are you . . . after I had made up my mind to assist you in every way and tried so hard to be kind to you?"

"I don't want to displease you, Mr. Scott," she said submissively, "but I can't think . . ."

"Now, now," he interrupted, "you don't have to think. Just jump up and get on your things. You'll feel all right after we're out of here. Oh, by the way," he added, as she walked slowly toward the hat rack, "I want to talk to Crane a minute. You just run along to the . . . let me see . . . to Bohlman's drug store on the corner. I'll meet you there in just a moment."

With halting steps she started toward the door to the hall.

"No, not that way," Scott instructed. "Use my private entrance."

As she passed out the importer skipped lightly to a little alcove dressing room. He brushed down his iron-gray hair and perked up the ends of his jaunty mustache. He buttoned his gray frock coat and from a glass on the stand took out a white carnation and fastened it in the lapel. The mirror before him

reflected a handsome, well dressed man with a silly and satisfied smirk. He seemed to have forgotten his mission to Crane for like the gray wolf on the trail he hurried now in the wake of his new secretary.

CHAPTER VIII

HER FIRST LUNCHEON

IN Kahn's they turn oysters into confections. In Kahn's they make cocktails sweet unless you want them dry. In Kahn's they play soft Venetian serenades and salacious waltzes. In Kahn's they have booths.

People come and go in Kahn's and eat luncheons. No one eats lunch.

"Don't you like it, now that you are here?" cooed Mr. Jerrold Scott.

"Yes, I like it . . . the place . . . but it seems so strange. . . . If I only thought . . . it was . . . right . . ."

"Now, let me be the judge of that, my dear. Do you think I would bring you here if it wasn't right? Why the very best people in New York eat at Kahn's. It's a little treat for you . . . and for me too," he added with a smile. "I'm so tired of eating at the club where everyone who sees me wants to sell me

something. And beside, I wanted you to see this place. It's a sort of . . . education for you. No harm. None at all."

He rambled on to cover her confusion until a sphinx-like figure stood beside them awaiting the pleasure of Mr. Scott—and guest. A guest in blue serge and yellow top boots; a new guest; a fresh guest; a young guest. "How will you have her?" thought the sphinx; "Broiled, or fried, or . . ." But if sphinxes can't talk they shouldn't think.

Scott twirled the end of his debonair mustache and adjusted his eye glass to inspect the booklike menu. He handed another to Gertrude. Its amplitude disconcerted her. She turned one of the half dozen pages and confronted line after line of inexplicable concoctions that she had never dreamed of. She couldn't have told whether they were things to eat or advertisements of a modiste's sartorial equipment. Here and there was a word that seemed to suggest food, but it was complemented before and after with intimidating phrases she could neither understand nor pronounce. Consomme à la Borigaule. Who ever

heard of that? And the meats; they were all braised; à la mode or à la Kahn.

The white aproned figure at her side insisted on thinking. It took cognizance of her dilemma and made mental suggestion. "Have ham and eggs," it counseled. "You'll find them on page five." But the thin lips emitted no sound; the immobile features remained immobile, until Scott broke the silence. For the benefit of the sphinx he was grandiose and deferent. The girl across from him might have been a duchess in disguise.

"Now, let's see, Miss Meyer; suppose we start with a little cocktail."

She looked up in evident alarm.

"I'd rather not, Mr. Scott," she said timorously. "I never drink."

The silent servitor communed again within himself.

"Oh, but you will; if you come to Kahn's with him you will. They all say they don't drink at first. But they all come around to it. Might as well have a bit now; take a Clover Leaf, it's mild."

But Gertrude, oblivious to this cynical suggestion, continued to gaze across at Scott.

"I wouldn't urge for the world," he acquiesced. "But you won't mind if I take something."

No, she wouldn't mind. "Isn't it kind of her not to object," thought the image in black and white. "So considerate; and she looks as if she could bend him around her little finger."

But now the image ceases his cogitations and becomes the alert and ready servant, for Scott addresses him.

"Let me have a dry Martini."

"One, sir?"

"Yes, one."

"Waiters are so horribly stupid!" thought the millionaire. "Didn't he hear her say she didn't drink." And aloud:

"And you may bring us some of the caviar canape and a little relish—olives and celery; then some blue points. That will do for the present; I'll give you the rest later."

The string orchestra struck up the serenade from "The Jewels." The sphinx like waiter

returned with the cocktail and the millionaire smacked his lips.

"This is what I call comfort," he said, beaming upon his young guest. "A quiet nook like this and congenial companionship. Where's the wrong? Some people would have you believe a man's a first class scoundrel if he invites a girl employee out to luncheon; and just because she is his employee. If it was some other employee or some other employer, why fine and dandy. Don't you see, my dear? Don't you see that it's perfectly harmless? Come, now; don't you?"

Gertrude thought it very harmless. At least, she said so. In reality she felt ill at ease. To begin with she was out of place and then the words of Catherine Wiggins' warning kept surging through her brain.

Scott ordered another cocktail.

"Sure you won't have one?" he asked. "Quite customary now. Most everyone takes them with their meals."

But she demurred.

"I'm sure I couldn't drink it," she told him, "even if I thought it was right."

He didn't urge her. He felt quite at peace with himself and with her. After the second cocktail and the relish Scott ordered a substantial luncheon. The tender squab chicken; creamed potatoes; asparagus tips; the tasty salad of nuts, California grapes and what not were a revelation to Gertrude.

Whatever reluctance she had felt about coming she experienced no such timidity about partaking of the food. It was all delicious. Scott was circumspect enough and extremely cordial. The spirit of the place asserted itself. The girl began to doubt whether her employer had committed such a heinous offense after all.

She felt suddenly emboldened to sound some viewpoints of her own. He had asked her for the twentieth time if she was enjoying herself.

"Yes, Mr. Scott," she agreed, "it's grand, the food, the music and everything; but tell me." . . . She looked squarely into his brown eyes . . . "did you bring your other private secretaries to eat here?"

He hesitated; was dumbfounded by the directness of the question and her temerity in

putting it. But Scott was never at a loss with women for long. He was smiling good naturedly at her now.

"Why, of course," he answered. "Some of them, at least. I haven't had the inclination to bring them all. You're different."

She was still staring into his eyes.

"And your wife," she said boldly; "does she know? Does *she* approve?"

"Why, you're putting me on trial, little girl," he laughed, in a disinterested sort of way, but the hilarity lacked mirth. "What on earth's come over you, just when we had begun to get acquainted and are having a good time?"

"Nothing; but I can't make myself believe I am doing right, or that you are, either."

He leaned over and placed a reassuring hand on hers.

"Put such thoughts out of your head, my child. I've told you that I wouldn't have brought you here if it hadn't been right. You see other people here, or would, if you could look about. Do you suppose every woman here is the wife, or daughter or sweetheart of the man she's with? Probably a

good many of them are other men's wives. That is wrong, of course, from one standpoint. But the world can't be so particular nowadays. There are a great many things that look wrong, or seem wrong, but when you get down to an analysis of them there isn't any real harm at all. For instance, I'm not going home and shout it through the house that I took luncheon with my new secretary, but if my wife was to come in here this minute I wouldn't feel so terribly put out about it and she wouldn't either. Why, there are any number of persons come here whom I know. Do you think I would bring you here if I was afraid of being seen!"

He waxed confident through his own eloquence and it was not without its effect on the girl. He was a good orator, was Jerrold Scott; as good as Catherine Wiggins. He had the positive side of the argument, too and she the negative.

Gertrude was almost convinced. Though she didn't *feel* he was right she had no weapon of logic or declamation to beat down his. She knew that she felt ill at ease in his pres-

ence and experienced an entirely opposite sensation when she was near his stepson. But she couldn't explain why.

She was meditating these impressions when Scott went pale and pressed a napkin to his face. He coughed and as he dropped the napkin reached hastily for his glass of water.

The girl bent forward in alarm.

"Are you ill?" she asked excitedly.

He recovered as quickly as he had been attacked.

"No, not ill," he said quietly. "I swallowed something the wrong way, I guess."

He was quite composed now, but he had good reason for distress. What he had "swallowed" was a vision of Paul Montgomery, who had just passed their booth.

The importer took out his watch.

"Gracious," he exclaimed, "it's nearly three o'clock. I must run for it. Have an appointment at the office at two-thirty. Here!" He peeled off a ten dollar note from his roll of bills. "You settle for the luncheon and come along. I'll tell them as I pass out."

. . . . . .

CHAPTER IX

IN FAIRYLAND

IN the first week of Gertrude's services as secretary to his father Jack Scott missed few opportunities to invade the sacred confines of the inner office. Scott frequently found him there, but if he felt any chagrin he kept it to himself. Jack always had some excuse or speedily framed one. The obvious evidences of the boy's motive, however, were not lost on the elder man.

Scott felt sufficiently assured that Gertrude wouldn't say anything about his own "fatherly interest" in her. He had apparently convinced her that this interest was natural and harmless, yet he knew she had yielded against her will.

For a girl of seventeen who was holding her first position in the business world Gertrude seemed to have absorbed some very emphatic opinions about a code of morals. Scott won-

dered where she got them. If he had stopped to consider the sophisticated young lady from the Woman's Christian Association he would have ceased to ponder the matter and probably have dispensed with Miss Wiggins' services. The thought of her coaching his private secretary in the ways of the worldly hadn't occurred to him. He knew that Gertrude had reluctantly surrendered to his importunities and that this very reluctance was his own protection.

Only one thing troubled him. That was the haunting vision of Paul Montgomery. But the luncheons continued despite this peril.

The younger Scott had not attempted any analysis of his motives, of Gertrude's interpretation of them, or of the outcome. He merely found his thoughts straying away from tariffs, discounts and other material symbols of his job and centering themselves on the little figure in blue serge down the hall. These thoughts were provocative of the excursions to the senior member's quarters. The more he saw of the girl the more he wanted to see her.

The power between man and woman is as inexplicable as it is glorious. There were probably within the immediate circle of young Scott's acquaintances a dozen girls whose physical allurements equalled or surpassed those of Gertrude Meyer. There were probably fifty whose native mentality was more on a footing with his own, yet if all these had been assembled with the demure stenographer in their midst, his eye would have sought her out and he would have gone to her.

It was on the day following Gertrude's capitulation to the elder Scott that Jack, learning his stepfather would be occupied for an hour or more at an important meeting of the trade, felt it incumbent on him to occupy the executive quarters of Scott & Son.

"Good morning, Miss Meyer," he said cheerily as he brushed into the private office without knocking. "I'm going to take a little respite from the routine to-day and look over the firm's affairs."

He seated himself at the big desk and ran through some of the letters Scott had opened before his departure. The private secretary

cast furtive glances and made pretense of writing on her typewriter. Soon Jack abandoned his aimless fingering of his father's correspondence and came over to the desk.

"Busy?" he asked.

"Not very. Mr. Scott didn't stay but a minute this morning."

"How's the work going now?"

"A little better, thank you, Mr. Scott. I get quite encouraged at times. Then again I seem to be terribly stupid."

"Oh, you're not that," he answered emphatically. "Quite the contrary, if you asked me. Don't belittle yourself that way, Miss—Gertrude." He stumbled a bit over the word, but felt rather heroic when he got it out. "You're getting on famously. I've heard the governor say so and you ought to be proud if you can satisfy him. He's particular and he has a mighty hard time getting a girl to fill the bill here."

"I can imagine he does," she replied artlessly; "that is, there are many things to be considered in a position of this kind. So

many girls talk about their employer's business. I know I should never do that."

"Of course you wouldn't. Anybody would trust you. They'd only have to look at you to do that."

His frank encomiums flustered her. But there was a sincerity about them and she felt no inclination to shrink from them as she did from the fulsome and patronizing speeches of his stepfather.

"Do you know, Miss Gertrude," he continued, "I was thinking yesterday that if you cared to, we might take a run up to that orphan asylum in the car and take your brothers home. You won't want to leave them there any longer now that you've got a good position and it would be such a dandy surprise for your mother. What do you say?"

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Scott," she answered, blushing. "It's awfully good of you, but the boys are home now. Mother and I brought them back Sunday."

"Well, then," he persisted, "couldn't I drive down and take you all out for a spin after

work? It would do you good, the little fellows, especially. They've been cooped up so long."

"I'd like to," she admitted, "but I'm afraid I couldn't. Besides you couldn't bring an auto down in our neighborhood. Folks wouldn't know what to make of it. We don't see them down there very often, and I never rode in one in my life."

"So much the better. You'd enjoy it all the more. Come, now, don't be so obdurate."

"So what?"

"Headstrong; stubborn; anything you like; only let me come down and take you riding, won't you?" He leaned a little closer and held her with his boyish, laughing eyes. "Please," he urged. "I won't make any pretense about the boys. We'll say it's just because I want to. Is that better?"

Here was direct attack, anyway. It was better than the father's insidious pleas, if less successful. She had dared not refuse Scott and she dared not grant the son's request as much as she felt she would like to. She

sought refuge in an excuse more veracious than Jack imagined.

"I'm afraid your father wouldn't like it, Mr. Scott," she parried. "Please don't ask me again. I'm sure I couldn't do it."

. . . . . .

But that evening he did ask again. He was speeding up Fifth Avenue in the Six when he caught sight of Gertrude crossing the thoroughfare at Twenty-sixth Street. Jack brought the big car to a halt at the curb and called:

"Miss Meyer!"

She turned, startled at the sound of her name in this alien bailiwick and then came hesitatingly toward him. "This is my lucky day," he cried laughingly. "I was going to look you up to-night, but I guess it would have been a hopeless job. Do you know I wasn't half finished this morning when the governor's unexpected return ended my visit. Come on and hop in, Miss Gertrude. You haven't the slightest excuse not to, this time, for it's just an accidental meeting. Lots of things are all

right when they just happen and aren't planned."

He jumped out and threw open the door.

"Please get in of your own accord," he pleaded, "so it won't look as if I'm kidnaping you. There's a policeman over there and he might get curious if he saw me carry you away by force, and that's just what I'm going to do if I have to."

In a second he was at the wheel with the girl at his side. She sat forward in the seat and caught hold of the door at her left with the tenacious grip of the uninitiated.

"Lean back and take it easy," he urged as the car glided along the smooth asphalt. "I'm not going to tip you out when I've had such a time getting you in. Never had an accident in my life and that's more than the family chauffeur can say."

He picked his way in and out of a maze of slower machines, slacking his speed under the eye of the crossing policemen and letting the car chug, chug ahead when he passed them.

Gertrude was so impressed with these operations and entranced by the novel sensation of

her first ride that she had uttered scarcely a word by the time they reached the Plaza. Scott turned into the park. "We'll just take a little spin through here," he told her, "and then I'll drive you to your home."

Impulsively she seized his arm, and the car swerved to the left.

"Oh, you mustn't do that, Mr. Scott. You mustn't take me home. There'd be a sensation and a scandal in the neighborhood. Mamma wouldn't like it, either."

"Then I'll only take you near it," he agreed. "Don't let's worry about that now. I'm enjoying myself too much to think of consequences. How about you?"

"It's perfectly wonderful."

Her testimonial came in soft, awe inspired tones, but flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes gave it zest.

"You're perfectly wonderful, too," was what the boy at her side wanted to say. He felt the thrill of her presence and her charm. There came to him that intuitive sense of perfection, completeness, or what you will. He knew only that he was happier than he had

been in his life and that he wouldn't have relinquished the joy of that particular moment for any earthly boon or duty.

Instinctively his free hand stole over and clasped hers. There were barriers of kid and cowhide, but the ecstasy of touch, of proximity; possession prevailed. She made no attempt to withdraw her hand and so, with the car's pace slackened, in atune with this subtler mood, they rolled on through the winding driveways until they had circled the park. The big monument to the Maine's heroic martyrs loomed ahead. To young Scott it's graceful figures seemed like ogres calling him out of fairyland. It meant the end of the ride for she had told him he must leave her at the park's entrance.

He drew the machine to a halt in the statue's shadow.

"Surely you don't have to get out here," he said. "If you won't tell me where you live you can tell me the direction. Is it the East Side?"

She nodded her assent and made no attempt to leave. Somehow she was as loath to go as

he. She too, had been in fairyland and the way out is much harder than the way in. In the moment of her hesitancy he shot the car ahead.

"I'll take you to the elevated. You can't object to that."

"No, but you mustn't go a step further."

He left her at the elevated stairs.

"Good-bye—Gertrude," he said heroically. "We'll have another jaunt like that soon."

"I don't know," she answered softly as she stood looking down at him.

"But you liked the ride?"

"I loved it," she said deliberately and turned and ran up the stairs.

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CHAPTER X

BUSINESS AND SILK STOCKINGS

JACK was on duty at eight the next morning, his heart beating fast with memory of the ride with Gertrude and in anticipation of his first independent act as a member of Scott & Son. He had a plan to cut down office expenses and this was to be his first big stroke as a business man.

A young man's dreams! What walking, breathing, impelling things they are! Scarcely more than a week in the office as a member of the firm, and Jack already, in his mind, had torn the place to pieces and rebuilt it. He had seen the business growing until he and his stepfather stood head and shoulders above all competitors. They would buy out their rivals, one by one, and remain the one big firm in their line in New York.

Through his dreams his mother and Ger-

trude persisted like strains of music in the tumult of a busy street. It was for his mother's sake, chiefly, he said to himself, that he would be a success. He could see her eyes shining approval and pride as she spoke of him to his stepfather.

Gertrude was as yet a melody, seeking voice. The trim little figure in blue, with the girlish sailor collar and the wistful, sweet face hadn't made itself entirely at home in the mysterious paths of the brain and the heart. But unmistakably Gertrude was in his heart, helping to make it pulse in glad, mad rhythm.

The success Jack dreamed was to be a clean success. Although he did not realize it, victories he had won and the popularity he had achieved among university mates and the fledglings of society were triumphs of his clean heart. He had never done anything of which he was ashamed. There was nothing to weaken his inborn magnetism which promised to make him a leader among men. Impetuousness was his only defect, if to leap head first into things is a fault in a young man. Just now he showed his impatience by strid-

ing back and forth in the empty office. A man with whom he made an appointment had failed to arrive on time. He had arranged to meet a phonograph salesman. By providing every department head with a business phonograph Jack had figured many stenographers could be dispensed with. This would cut down expenses and improve the office discipline. He planned to place what girls were needed in a separate office where they could type all letters under a superintendent who would be responsible for the work.

The saving in salaries, Jack calculated, would make a ten strike with his stepfather. For his own part he was sorry some of the girls would have to lose their positions. But obsessed with his plan of economy, he smothered his qualms. He was a business man now, and must be *all* business.

As for the stenographers who would have to go and the one who should be chosen superintendent, he would leave the selection to the head of the sales department and to Crane. This, he believed, would avert resentment of what might be considered forwardness on his

part and, perhaps, flatter them a bit. He wanted the men to like him.

At ten minutes after the hour the salesman arrived. Jack had drawn up a tentative contract and got everything in shape to present to his stepfather. He had finished with his man in twenty minutes. In the meantime, the office force had begun to drift in, among them the head bookkeeper who had not been late in his twenty years of service.

"You're on the job early," Crane replied to Jack's "Good morning."

"Yes, I had a little extra matter to look into this morning."

The junior partner did not divulge the nature of his new project. He had decided to get the governor's O. K. first. It would be embarassing if he proceeded with his plan and Scott vetoed it, and he knew the tactful Crane would indorse the scheme when the time came.

"Good morning, Mr. Scott. My, but you're a grind! If I had all the dough you've got you wouldn't see me around till noon."

This was from Dollie, the stenographer assigned to Jack. She was a merry sort, flaunt-

ing good looks and modish clothes of the garish kind. Chewing gum was not an occasional pastime with Dolly; it was a perennial duty. She stopped beside his desk long enough to adjust her hat for the last time before taking it off in the dressing room.

"That's one girl you've reformed," Crane chuckled as she skipped out of the room. "She was the last to show up from work until you came. Now she's the first."

There wasn't time to answer this bit of badinage if Jack had cared to for Dollie pranced out to her chair beside his desk.

She crossed her legs and began reading a letter. She had wondered, had this blithe young creature why the junior partner didn't show some interest in her. Most everyone else did. Perhaps she had been too ready to accept it. She would have to practice a little indifference herself. She read through the letter twice and then glanced up over it. Jack was in a brown study, entirely oblivious of her presence. "What's the use?" she thought. "He's the stupidest man in New York! But some day

he'll own Scott & Son. It's up to little me!"

Still perusing the letter, she broke into a laugh. She felt that he was looking at her.

"Gee, this is funny," she confided, as she glanced up and caught his eye. "You know that one stand actor I was telling you about who lived at our boarding house? Well, he went out West with a tank show and it's gone dry. He writes yours truly from Warsaw, Indiana, and wants me to send him fare to Chicago. That's what you get for being a good fellow. Well, I guess he'll walk. Know what he did to me once? Made an appointment at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street and then stood me up for the taxi fare."

The junior partner smiled in spite of himself, but vouchsafed no solution of the one night actor's plight.

"He's a pretty good fellow, at that," Dollie rambled on. "You ought to meet him and let him show you the town after the lights are out some night. He's an expert, believe *me*. I'm telling you about him because I want to

ask your advice. Do you think I should send him any change?"

"Certainly, if he's a friend of yours and you think you can afford it," Jack condescended.

"Oh, I've got the price, all right, but I wanted to get some clothes; new stockings, especially. These don't match my dress. They're a shade too light. See?"

She revealed an unnecessary display of silk hosiery and the junior partner glanced uneasily about the room.

"But I guess I'll make these do and send him the money if you say so, Mr. Scott."

"I recommend that you use your best judgment, Miss Williams," the young man suggested. The dignity of Scott & Son was being a trifle jostled, he felt. "If you don't mind, now I'd like to give you a letter."

"Oh, very well," she agreed. But she resented his frigidity with a pretty pout.

Dollie's pout was worth looking at. It enhanced her babyish charms, which from the standpoint of mere feminine pulchritude were indisputable. She had pretty blonde hair

and wore it in undulating waves well down over her ears. Her eyes were brown and of the appealing sort, topped by dark brows; lips of a bewitching curve and the whole contour of her face was round, made perfect in piquant appeal by a pug nose. Her figure tended to roundness, too, and soft curves. Altogether, she was what men call a "cuddly" girl and what women term a "doll baby."

But this innocuous exterior was not in keeping with Dollie's impressions and practices in life. Like Catherine Wiggins, she had gained wisdom in the ways of the world, but Catherine's was a passive or negative knowledge and Dollie's an active one. All she courted above a good time was a better one.

She tried to interest this rich young employer as she had others. She cherished dreams of one falling in love with her and giving her the smart clothes and envied luxuries of the rich. If she could have read the workings of young Scott's mind at this moment she would have seen the hopelessness of trying her wiles on him. He looked at her now and then as her typewriter keys clattered off his

letter and he saw only the antithesis of another; her brazenness emphasized the modesty of this other; her worldliness contrasted poorly with the other's simplicity.

As this image of Gertrude came again Dollie passed out of his head entirely. He turned to some of his routine work—the checking over of vouchers. It was too early to approach his stepfather, though he would have welcomed any excuse for doing so. For now the memory of this little figure in blue serge who only yesterday had clung to his arm so trustingly in the auto, dominated even his prodigious plan for office economy.

It was nearly noon before he got an audience with Scott. He had opportunity for only a scant "good morning" to the girl, then plunged into his scheme. The millionaire confessed interest. At least he was glad to see the evidence of initiative. The boy's sincere concern in a business that would some day be his was gratifying. But Scott was a bit amused at the idea of segregating the stenographers.

"Aren't you afraid all the men out there

will go on a strike?" he commented jokingly. "I've thought of this before, Jack," he added seriously. "It looks good on paper and it works in some offices. The trouble is that in economizing we have to throw a lot of girls out of employment. Now don't say anything about me being kind-hearted. It's vanity, I guess." He raised his voice and cast a covert glance at his private secretary. "Why, I haven't made an unnecessary change in the force out there for years. I like to have my employees feel they really belong here and that I am their protector. Anyhow, I fix an appropriation and let Crane and the other heads select the help.

"But I'm not going to turn your idea down entirely," he went on, as he saw the new partner's crestfallen look. "Let's fix it this way. The sales manager is asking for another stenographer right now. We'll buy him a machine. Girls in other parts of the office who, you say, are idle part of the time, can take dictation from it. When someone else wants more help we'll get another machine. In that way we won't have to discharge anybody,

and in a few years we'll be putting out extra work at the old cost. The way the business is growing it won't be long before your plan is in force throughout the plant—except in the president's office." He smiled at his own facetiousness. "I'm afraid I'm too old for these innovations, Jack, and shall always prefer an animated amanuensis.

"Now, isn't that better?" he finished. "If you approve of it, talk to Crane and the others about it. If they come to me I'll say that whatever my partner advises, goes."

"That's great, governor! It gets around the only difficulty. I was worried about the girls, myself. Now I feel like a white man. You're a grand boss and a good partner. Do you know," he added humorously as he turned toward the door, "I'm rather proud of you!"

"Thanks, Jack, and the same to you."

It was nearly three o'clock when the junior partner returned to report the installation of the machine. He brought Crane with him as a witness of its efficiency.

The private office was tenantless.

The boy looked from his stepfather's desk

to the vacant chair of the private secretary, and then to Crane.

"Why, where's Miss Meyer?" he asked. "Hasn't she returned from luncheon?"

The bookkeeper shook his head and looked solemn.

"That's funny. What time does she go out?"

"About one o'clock, I think."

The junior partner looked troubled.

"Something must have happened," he suggested. "I hope she gets back before the governor."

The usually evasive Crane offered an intimation of his own.

"I imagine," he said, without change of countenance, "that they'll be back about the same time."

The significance of this statement was lost on young Scott.

"Why, what makes you think that?" he queried.

"No reason; no reason at all," insisted the enigmatical clerk. "Only, they went out about the same time."

"But that won't excuse her with the governor, Crane. His time is his own, and hers—"

"Is Mr. Scott's."

The imperturbable Crane became perturbing. He had said nothing and everything. Usually the acme of inoffensiveness, he had waxed exceedingly offensive. To young Scott now there dawned a world of meaning behind these innoxious words. He resented them, and yet he pondered them. He took refuge in his first assertion of officiousness.

"Very well, Crane," he said, sententiously. "I'll wait. You can go."

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CHAPTER XI

LOVE AND TIT FOR TAT

WHEN Paul Montgomery passed the booth in Kahn's restaurant he saw Jerrold Scott. His first inspiration had been to hale the importer with hearty "howdy do." But as he turned with hand extended he saw Scott's extraordinary guest. Intuitively he checked the words of greeting and passed on.

He had not only seen Scott, but he knew that Scott had seen him. Montgomery wanted Scott's good will.

Jack Scott might be immersed in business and immune to the charms of budding débutantes, but Paul wasn't. He was in love and admitted it, though his convictions hadn't been imparted to the person most concerned. He wanted to marry Josephine Scott.

Now, young Montgomery was worried. He had gathered, and quite reasonably, that "Joe's" millionaire father didn't look upon

him as the only logical candidate in New York for the hand of the heiress. He could not see the why of it, but the evidences were palpable. Scott was decently cordial, but only that. "Joe" liked him. He was sure of that. He was inclined to believe her regard ran deeper. They had glorious times together. The rides to the country club, the dances and the delightful tête-à-têtes in her home were hallowed landmarks on his aimless road of life. If the road led anywhere its terminus was "Joe."

But somehow, of late these jaunts seemed to have grown rarer; the landmarks scattered and obscured. The only rendezvous he had now was her home. If he came with the car Mrs. Scott seemed to have unwonted leisure and a hankering for air. If she were "out" "Joe" thought of some friend who was pining for an outing.

Though Montgomery's brain rebelled against egregious duties it tolerantly led him through this maze of coincidence and offered a conclusion. Something was amiss and the obstruction, he believed, was Scott.

"I don't believe your father likes me very well, Joe," he told her one afternoon.

"Why?"

"I don't know why. I wish I did. Has he said anything to you?"

"Why, how foolish!" she parried. "What *could* he say?"

"He could say he didn't want you running around with me," he blurted with uncommon astuteness. "I don't say he has told you that, but something must have happened. We used to go and come as we pleased and now something always interferes."

He set down his half-drained tea cup on the little ornate stand and leaned toward her. "*You* like me, don't you, Joe?"

"Of course I do, Paul," she answered naïvely. "Everybody likes you."

"But that isn't what I mean, Joe."

He bent closer and took her hand. "Everybody likes you, too . . . but they don't like you as I do, Joe. I love you; did you know that?"

He was only an idle, pampered son of luxury, this Paul, but apparently, he was human.

The infinite tenderness in his voice proclaimed him so, and the deep color that flushed the young girl's cheeks buttressed this conclusion.

"Tell me, Joe, whether you love me."

The hand in his tightened. Those glorious words of confirmation were unneeded, but she spoke them:

"I do love you, Paul," and was in his arms.

. . . . . .

In this seventh heaven of young Montgomery's now there was but one cloud. It so happened that on that eventful afternoon in Kahn's, he, too, had had a guest. Quite a harmless affair, but distressing in view of impending duty. His approach to Scott was barred by this vague specter of an innocent diversion. "But," he reasoned with quite laudable acumen, "if her father was there with someone I never saw he can't explain any better than I can, if an explanation is forthcoming."

So Montgomery betook himself to Scott & Son.

"A young gentleman to see you, sir," said

the custodian of Scott's privacy after due formality of entrance. He handed the millionaire a card.

A student of facial utterance would have detected something germane in the importer's contemplation of this bit of cardboard. To the waiting hallboy and to the private secretary, who was watching him, he betrayed only indecision; doubt as to whether he knew his caller, or cared to receive him. But the hesitancy was brief.

"Show him in," he instructed.

The boy started to the door.

"Wait!" Scott commanded. He turned smilingly to Gertrude. "As I recall it, this young man has something of a personal nature in view. Would you mind stepping into the other room?"

"Now," he said to the attendant, "bring Mr. Montgomery in."

Paul, prepared for a calamity, or, at least, a boreal reception, confronted a genial, smiling host.

"How do you do, sir," said this fancied foe. "Glad to see you; have a seat."

The intrusive Paul accepted, and Scott settled himself at his desk. He passed a box of his irreproachable perfectos and took one himself.

"Wonderful weather we're having," he commented. "Makes one want to get away from this. I suppose you take advantage of it on the links. Wish I could find time for it myself."

"Why don't you?" said Mr. Montgomery. He divined that, perchance, business claimed the millionaire's attention and that this extenuation had been implied, but he could think of no other response.

"Well, I might, Paul, but I have to set a rigid example for Jack. New member of the firm, you know, and he needs schooling. But he goes it a little too hard, at that, I fear. Why don't you run around and take him out occasionally?"

Mr. Montgomery clutched the sides of his chair. He pinched himself surreptitiously and blinked. Yes, it was there, the chair and his leg and, if he was not woefully mistaken, there was Mr. Scott. But he was grievously

astonished. Reassured as to these tangible evidences of locale and actuality, he recalled the purpose of his visit.

"Mr. Scott," he began boldly and forgetting the retort courteous that the importer had invited, "I came to see you on a most important matter. Important, I might say to you, as well as me; certainly the most serious I have ever considered. I want to marry your daughter."

If he had clutched the chair before, he must needs cling to it for life now or plunge foremost to the floor.

"I am honored," said Scott serenely. "What are the young lady's wishes?"

A half minute passed before the petitioner found speech. It came at last, quite as lucid as the query.

"I think I can assure you on that point. She is of the same mind."

"And the mother?"

"I cannot say, sir. I hope, though, that she may prove as generous as you."

"Little doubt of it, Paul. We have always liked you. I've had my suspicions; so has

Mrs. Scott; just a bit sudden, I'll admit. Joe's very young; not eighteen yet, you know. But youth is scarcely a barrier to love. You'll have to wait awhile, of course; you expected that."

"Yes, we will wait. We talked of that. Josephine isn't exactly eligible yet, I know—the coming out and all that; but privately, sir—confidentially, as it were, you will . . . concede me . . . that?"

"Certainly, Paul. I'll talk to Mrs. Scott to-night. Let's pay tribute to the occasion." The prospective father-in-law took out his watch. "It's one o'clock," he said. "Come lunch with me—at Kahn's."

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CHAPTER XII

THE FIXER AT WORK

TO make a paradox of time worn maxims, why, if experience is the best teacher, is there no fool like an old fool?

Scott, just emerging from the meshes of one amorous imbroglio, was becoming fast involved in another. He had not escaped lightly in the one case and the tolls were already forthcoming in the next. Witness, Paul Montgomery. Not that the importer had paid so unwillingly in this particular. He had never had any real aversion to Paul; the young man was an idler, to be sure, but he wasn't discouraged in this and could scarcely be held to task. The Montgomerys' fortune was nearly as great as the Scotts' and of longer standing. Socially, Scott had entered the inner circle through his second matrimonial alliance and the Montgomerys had always been there.

The importer knew his wife had cherished dreams of a still higher station for Josephine and that there would be a tinge of disappointment. He had felt that himself, in the moment of his genial capitulation. But he had drowned this still, small voice of rebuke in contemplation that the inevitable would have happened, anyhow. If Josephine loved Paul —and he had Paul's word for it—then neither he nor Mrs. Scott could seriously oppose their union.

So Scott, who possessed an eery faculty for being in the right when it so suited his convenience, continued his visionary justification. Orally and mentally he was such a virtuoso in this respect that he convinced not only others, but himself. He was aroused from these cogitations now by the jingle of the 'phone.

It was Stuart, the "fixer" on the other end of the wire.

"Well?" said the importer, impatiently.

"They got away from me," came the voice; "the Wilson girl and her aunt. There is no way to stop them now. They've got five minutes' start. But you have five minutes also,

to get the new secretary out of the office and to get away yourself, if you want to avoid a scene. I'm coming right over. If you can keep them outside I'll try to get them away."

"Got you," snapped the millionaire. He never argued in emergencies.

The first thing to do was to get rid of Gertrude.

He called her over to his desk.

"What's the matter, little girl?" he said, solicitously. "You've been sad all day. I believe you're worrying over your work and are tired out. I want you to put on your things now and run along home and come back fresh and smiling in the morning."

"But I've three or four more letters to write," she protested.

"Never mind, they can wait. Come, that's a good girl; do as I say. You'll feel better for it to-morrow." He got up, walked toward the rack, and took down her hat and wrap.

She had nothing to do but obey, and started for the door. Scott followed. She raised her hand toward the knob. He stepped

quickly and caught her wrist. He bent and kissed her hand, and with his free arm crushed her to him in fierce embrace.

She was too stunned to scream. Her breath went out of her, and her strength. What little she regained she used for futile struggle to escape him. But Scott's was a leonine passion, long pent and now unloosed. It was the first vehement outburst of his desire. Till now he had been tender; salaciously so, perhaps, but surreptitious, too. She had had doubts; doleful misgivings, but they had been throttled by his persuasive cunning. Now the mask was off. He stood stripped of his paternal zeal and revealed for what he was—the hungry wolf who had trailed her to Kahn's.

He had released her now and stepped back, smiling in mock penitence.

"You're irresistible, Gertrude," he panted. . . . "I'm sorry." He threw open the door of the private entrance, and stood holding it while he snapped out his watch. He had two minutes of grace. "Run along, now," he said nervously. "Get a good rest, and to-morrow we'll start all over."

He closed the door quickly as she passed out, and stumbled along the passage of the private entrance, blinded by a flood of tears.

Scott rang for Crane and spoke sharply:

"Our former secretary, Miss Wilson, and a relative are going to do us the honor of a call. They are coming at once. Will you make it your duty to stand at the outer door and explain that I am out?"

"They have been here before, sir; twice. I told them. I will tell them again."

"Very well, be quick about—"

The door of the private entrance flung open with a force that sent the papers flying off Scott's desk. A sharp-featured woman swept in, dragging a pretty girl by the arm.

"You may go," Scott commanded. This to Crane, who stood open-mouthed at the sudden intrusion, but vanished now with all speed.

"So you," exclaimed this roiled champion of virtue, "are the devil who danced with my girl and now don't want to pay? Well, you will, I guess!"

"Your girl?" the millionaire inquired suavely. "I thought she was an orphan."

"So she is. But I'm her guardian and a kind one, don't you forget it."

"But rather negligent of your duties, madam, I would say."

"Oh, you're smart, aren't you? Very clever! Well, you may fool young girls, but you won't pull any wool over my eyes. I've tried to lay eyes on you and now I'm here. I want to tell you you can't get away from me so easy. What's a few thousand dollars to a young woman's happiness? Why, this girl's whole life is wrecked. She'll just pine away and die!"

Scott glanced at this fading victim of his fervor, whose color just now was a blooming red. Her eyes dropped as they met his. She seemed ill at ease, if in no peril of immediate dissolution.

She looked up timidly and ashamed. "I didn't want to come, Mr.—"

"You shut up," shouted the gentle custodian. "I'll do the talking here!" Her voice rose to such a pitch that it might have been heard on Fifth Avenue, and Scott demurred.

"Why, my good woman, you can do all the

talking, but you will have to talk like a human being, or I'll—" he held up a warning finger and stepped toward her—"I'll summon some assistance and have you carried down into the street."

"No, you won't!" she fairly shrieked under his very nose; "no you—"

The door from the corridor was thrown open and there appeared—the "fixer."

"Why on earth didn't you wait for me, Miss Wilson? I told you everything would be all right!" Stuart explained. "Come away from here if you expect any satisfaction at all. This is no place to settle such things!"

"Then, we'll settle them in the court-room, Mr. Stuart; here or in a court-room! Do you hear me?"

"Now, my dear miss—"

"Wait!" came a ringing voice. "Wait!" It was Scott's. "You had your chance, Stuart. Now I'll take mine. This woman is an impostor. Not only an impostor, but a ridiculous one. She'll get out of here now while she has the chance, or she'll go out in the custody of an officer!"

He stepped quickly to the phone on his desk and lifted the receiver.

"What will it be, Miss—Wilson, home or the police station?"

"Home, Mis—ter Scott," she drawled in mock submissiveness—"but the court-room tomorrow. Come, Estelle. This is no place for ladies."

"Nor for blackmailers," said Scott, and dropped the 'phone.

"Now, Mr. Fixer," he continued, when they had passed out, "you can resume your negotiations."

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CHAPTER XIII

OGRE AND PRINCE

WHEN Gertrude reached the street with the imprint of Scott's burning kisses on her lips, she stood dazed. In the passing throng she saw smiling faces; sober faces; honest faces. But from them all she shrank; to her each man was a figure in gray with a white carnation in his lapel and brown eyes glittering with lascivious desire. Each woman was an image in cerise with a pointing finger of portent—a Catherine Wiggins, whom in a moment of childish pride and loyalty, she had thought prudish and presumptuous. From these she flinched too. They were more appalling than the image of the gray wolf, for the pointing finger said Stop! and the silent voice cried, "Look out, girlie! Look out!"

It was like some signpost at a dangerous crossing that she had ignored; she had gone on, and now disaster had come. She made

her way aimlessly through the crowd, ignorant of locale or destination.

She longed to seek the refuge of her mother's arms, and reveal the awful happenings of the afternoon, yet she feared the consequences that such a confession would cause. She would not crush the little flower of happiness that had just blossomed in her home. No, she must go on and bear it in silence. Her happiness, her peace of mind, were but little things compared to the happiness of her mother.

She should never have gone to luncheon with Scott in the first place, and yet—no, that wouldn't have been any solution, for she knew that if she had refused he would not have kept her in his employ. She arrived at this true perspective of things, and while it did not cheer her, it strengthened her. Even the finger of scorn now was less disdainful, for her determination to conceal everything from her mother and return to work and—if worst came to worst—to continue the luncheons with Scott —clothed her in the mantle of a martyr. It was simply that she must make up her mind

to bear his fatherly and more than fatherly advances or give up her position, and that she would not do.

These conclusions recalled to her the fact that it was pay day and that she had not drawn her salary. She turned and hastened back to the offices, where Crane gave her the usual order on the cashier.

Her mother's joy at her early return, her enthusiastic recital of the many uses to which this third week's wage could be put, and her pride in her little girl who could bring so much money into the home, more than repaid Gertrude. It made amends, almost, for her shame, and fortified her in her determination to continue at work. There must be a limit to Scott's insults; in a public office; in a public building of this kind, he could not pursue her too far.

She was sustained, too, by some mysterious influence and sense of protection. Perhaps if Gertrude could have analyzed her feelings, she would have found that this influence was a welcome one; a very powerful factor in helping her to arrive at her heroic decision.

Since that trip to fairyland in the big motor car Gertrude had seen young Scott only in the office. He had asked her again and again to take another ride with him. She knew she wanted to, but she didn't dare. She liked this young junior partner better than she had ever liked anyone in the world except her mother and her brothers.

She didn't describe to herself just what this admiration was, but she knew that she always felt a quickening of the pulse whenever Jack appeared, and a sense of loneliness when he went out and left her with Scott. She was groping in that mystic realm of love where tender dreams enchant the youthful mind. She longed to own to her feelings for Jack, but her relations with his stepfather precluded this.

There was in Gertrude an inborn sense of decency. She saw the trap into which she had fallen and in the loneliness of her miserable tenement room, hot tears trickled down on to the pillow, while she choked back sobs that would have awakened Heine and Rudie.

She returned to the office Monday morning

with a quaking heart, but firm in her purpose to fight it out. She found Scott cheerful, but not offensively cordial, and apparently unmindful of what to her was a tragedy two days before.

He gave her a quantity of routine dictation and she went back to her desk to transcribe it. She cast covert glances at him from time to time, but he was usually occupied with his papers. At length she felt intuitively that he was looking at her. She glanced up and their eyes met.

"You still seem unhappy, little secretary," he said. "I hope you will forgive me for what happened Saturday afternoon, for I am sincerely and deeply sorry. I am only a man . . . now and then I go to pieces for a moment . . . but I always regret it directly I regain my composure."

He arose and came slowly towards her. He carried in his hand a little box. He stopped before her.

"I want to give you a little peace offering, as it were," he said lightly, and opening the box revealed a handsome ring.

She whirled round in her chair and got up. Unconsciously she shrank away from him, and he was, or feigned that he was, deeply hurt by her aversion.

"Don't be childish, little girl, I offer you this little trinket with no strings attached, just as from friend to friend. Won't you take it, please?"

"I can't," she answered brokenly, "I wouldn't *dare*. Please don't."

"I don't know why you act so with me," said the millionaire with an injured air, "I had this ring made . . . for someone else, to be truthful. The someone else turned out to be an ungrateful, heartless person. I offer it you in all honesty and good faith. You refuse it. I have told you again and again that you may safely leave the question of propriety to me."

"But I haven't always found it safe, Mr. Scott."

"Oh, come now . . . you mean because I lost my head a bit the other afternoon. I have told you for that I am sincerely sorry."

He advanced closer, and there was in his eyes that look that she had seen before.

"You are so pretty, little secretary, you know you could have upset a stone image."

Trapped and cornered, all her courageous resolutions failed her. She backed away from him towards the wall. She was afraid.

"I hope . . . Mr. Scott . . . you will not force me to leave. I have been here for three weeks; my mother has known the first rest for years. I thought I would be so happy here and I want so badly to keep on earning enough money to keep my mother from the washtub."

"And why shouldn't you? You will, of course, you will."

"But if I am to stay . . ."

"Stay? Why, certainly you'll stay. You are not thinking of leaving?"

"Then I must ask you, please to let me go to lunch alone . . . and to . . ."

"To what?"

"I don't know just what to say. I am afraid . . . I am afraid; but oh, Mr. Scott, I just *can't* give up my position. . . . I just can't!"

"You won't do that. I won't hear of it, little secretary, you know that I have told you I want to be a friend to you and I do and I shall be a friend of yours. Now, don't you think that you are just a little, wide-eyed child dodging shadows and shivering from something just because it's new and you don't entirely grasp it?"

She was on the verge of tears. She struggled to retain composure.

"I don't know," she stammered. "I could be so happy here if only . . . you would . . . if I could just take dictation and that would be all."

"That is all, little girl. When I talk to you of other things it is only because I am fond of you. I have discovered in you an interesting, fresh personality. You are so frank, so unspoiled by the world. I love to watch you grow; to see your mind unfold. I am grieved that you should accept my interest in you in the wrong way."

This assertion of exceeding solicitation on the part of the millionaire was cut short by the entrance of his son. Jack had made the

incursion into the private office in the hope of finding Gertrude alone. It was early, and he was somewhat surprised to see his stepfather at his desk.

"Good morning, governor, you are at work early to-day."

"Oh, not particularly, my boy. What can I do for you?"

The junior partner cast a sidelong glance at Gertrude. A sort of a secret thought wave passed between them. Jack was inspired.

"Well, the little matter I want to speak to you about concerns . . . Miss . . . Meyer here. Perhaps I might as well say it in front of her. I was talking to Crane about the stenographers the other day and he mentioned . . . casually, that your private secretary had a good deal of correspondence. Added, I believe, that while she was progressing finely under your . . . encouragement and care, the work was a little heavy for her. Now, I have a very efficient stenographer assigned to me, governor, and I thought . . . that . . . if it was perfectly agreeable to you . . . inasmuch as the dictation I have is rather

light . . . in comparison with yours . . ." He flushed and blurted, "that we might make an exchange of private secretaries. In one sense you might be the gainer by this transaction, and in another sense . . ." He looked at Gertrude, "I might be."

Scott glanced keenly at the junior partner. His eyes blinked good naturedly with an owl-like penetration, of the boy's motive. He reached over leisurely towards the box of perfectos on his desk, selected one, and passed the box to Jack.

"Have one," he said, casually.

Jack accepted.

"Who is the young lady assigned to you, Jack?"

"Miss Williams."

"Oh!"

"A very efficient young woman, I assure you, governor."

"Yes?"

"Yes—very competent."

Scott got up and walked over midway between Jack and Gertrude. He stood looking first at one and the other in a sort of quizzical

way, and then his half smile broadened into a grin as his eyes fastened on Gertrude. His jaunty little mustache now took on similitude to Mephisto's. The twinkle in his eye grew almost fiendish as he looked at the girl and asked:

"What do you think of my stepson's suggestion, Miss Meyer?"

The girl flushed, faltered for an answer, glanced towards the boy and then at the ceiling. She turned then to Scott with a look of resignation.

"Whatever you wish, Mr. Scott," she said.

The millionaire turned to his stepson.

"I'm afraid, Jack," he declared good-naturedly, "that Miss Meyer is not sufficiently enthusiastic about the change. I appreciate your consideration of me, but I have every reason to believe that my present secretary will fill the bill here. Of course she was new, but I feel competent to assist her and instruct her better than people in the outer office could do. Don't believe I recall just who Miss Williams is, but I guess, my boy, you had better worry along with her."

"All right, governor, just as you wish."

The boy withdrew as gracefully as he could, and Scott returned to his desk. He was silent for a moment. He sat looking toward the window apparently oblivious of Gertrude's presence. Then he turned toward her. He swung about in his chair and addressed the girl.

"I suppose you see a good deal of Jack . . . on and off . . . when I'm out?"

"No, he only comes in here when he has business, I believe."

"Very often?"

"No, sir, very seldom."

"Does he ever talk to you about . . . *personal* things?"

Gertrude turned and looked at Scott, her eyes dropped, and her beautiful dark lashes concealed them.

"No, sir."

"Well, if he should . . . don't tell him anything. . . ."

He got up, walked towards her speaking slowly: "Anything about *our* affairs, you know

. . . about those lunches together . . . or anything . . . he wouldn't understand it."

"Nobody does," said the girl with emphasis.

Scott advanced two or three steps at a jump.

"What do you mean? Who did you tell about it? Have you told anybody about it?"

"No, but everybody who doesn't know seem to take the trouble to warn me not to."

"Everybody's a fool. Has it hurt you any? Everybody's busy minding everybody's business which is none of their business. By Heaven, with all the hypocrites making up for saints and dealing out gospel, a man can't call his life his own any more. You just listen to them politely . . . then forget it."

He advanced till he was quite close to her. He bent forward and took her hand. Involuntarily she shrank from him, but he retained his clasp on her.

"You are not afraid of me, little secretary, are you?"

"Oh, Mr. Scott," she exclaimed as she leaped to her feet, "you mustn't do that! Really now, you mustn't!"

"And why mustn't I? I like you, little secretary, and you may like me."

His voice softened as he looked into her eyes.

"Now, you *do* like me, just a teeny, weeny, little bit. Don't you?"

"I like you . . . but . . . not like that, you remember what you promised me just now."

"Yes, I do, little girl, but you're a great temptation. You ought to realize that and appreciate my self-control. I haven't tried to kiss you to-day."

But his abstinence was only momentary. He bent over her quickly and seized her again in his arms. She felt again the burning pressure of his lips. She struggled to escape his embrace and an unexpected reënforcement came—a knock at the door. Scott stepped back a pace.

"Come in," he called, and there appeared the "fixer."

"Hello! Stuart, what's the good word?"

"Very good indeed. You are quite a valuable assistant."

Gertrude was apparently occupied with her stenographer's pad. Scott raised a finger to his lips and addressed the girl.

"Mr. Stuart and I have a little personal matter to talk over . . . would you mind, Miss Meyer, if I ask you to leave us for a moment?"

She welcomed the chance for escape and stepped quickly to the door.

"What's the good word, Stuart?" the millionaire asked as she passed out.

"All settled. She accepted the five thousand. I guess that gives you a clean bill of health with the Wilson girl. But I am not hankering for another case of the same kind."

"You got away with it all right, didn't you?"

"Yes, but that kind of a thing gets on my nerves. Now for Heaven's sake don't give me another one right away. It looks . . . very much as if I'd have another job pretty soon."

Stuart glanced toward the new secretary's vacant chair.

"Don't let that worry you, old boy," laughed

Scott. "Success spells success, just as money gets money. I'm judge of what's going on here and you're . . . just the attorney at court, not the counselor. That reminds me Simpson, in the sales department, has got a little difficulty on his hands and I want you to take it up right away. I'll go out and talk it over with him a minute and let you know about it. Just wait a second, will you, please?"

Scott hurried to the outer office. In a second after Scott passed out Gertrude returned.

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CHAPTER XIV

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

GEORGE STUART was a man of considerable personality and address. He had a remunerative practice aside from his associations with Scott. He lived and dressed up to his income, and on the whole got thorough enjoyment out of life. Stuart was a bachelor and something of a boulevardier. He was the kind of man who works hard and when the day's task is done shakes off the shop and goes in quest of untrammeled recreation. Night usually found him in the first three or four rows at some theatrical premier or at his club. Stuart was cheerful and a good deal of a wit, so he was always welcome. He steered clear of politics and had no axes to grind. All in all he was about as popular a man about town as one could find.

In his attitude towards women he was about as scrupulous as Scott, but he was more

guarded in his methods. Now, the fact that the importer had employed an exceedingly pretty young secretary hadn't escaped Stuart. He wouldn't have taken Gertrude out to luncheon for half his fortune, especially not in *broad daylight.* But if she would doff those girlish clothes and get into something a little more mature, he figured she would make a very attractive companion for an evening's jaunt.

He had determined to broach this matter the first time he found an opportunity seemed to have arrived. He bestowed one of his most winning smiles on the girl as she resumed her place at her desk and inquired gayly:

"How are you getting along?"

"Splendidly, Mr. Stuart."

With one eye on the door through which Scott had departed, Stuart approached a little closer, swinging his stick in a care free way.

"How—how do you like Mr. Scott?" he asked.

"Which one?" she parried naïvely.

"Which one? Why, there's only one

Mister Scott. We won't call the young fellow that; he's just a boy. I've known Jack ever since he was riding a hobby horse. He must be . . . let me see . . . Jack must be . . ."

"He's twenty-four," the girl interrupted quickly, and Stuart started as if someone had switched on an electric current under him. He was watching her keenly now. Apparently in his contemplated rôle of Romeo he was an added starter in a three horse race and he had thought it was just a match affair with the odds a little in his favor.

"How do you know his age?" he said.

"Crane told me." She didn't look up and busied herself with some work at her desk.

"Crane!" exclaimed the lawyer. "Does he ever talk except to say 'yes, sir,' 'no, sir' and 'thank you, sir'?"

"No, but I asked him."

"Oh, I see; and did Jack ask Crane how old you are, too?"

"I don't know, sir."

"How old *are* you, Miss Meyer?"

"Seventeen . . . past."

"Very far past?"

"Eighteen next March."

Vaguely she knew what was coming this time. Three weeks in an office had sufficed to rend the meager veneer of innocence with which a girl of the metropolis may be sheathed at times.

Stuart assumed his most gallant air; grandiose yet condescending.

"If I tell you something . . . something real nice, will you promise to store it away and not say anything about it? You're a mighty sweet girl, Miss Meyer and . . . you could go a long way with me. Do I make myself clear?"

"Very clear, Mr. Stuart." She met his supercilious smile with cold, fixed stare. "When I came here I might not have known what you meant. Now it's *very* clear."

"Yes," he answered unabashed, "a young girl can learn a great deal in three weeks. I know lawyers who got all their education in less time than that. Well, what do you say? Hurry . . . J. R. may walk in on us any minute."

"He wouldn't be so greatly shocked if he did. But tell me something Mr. Stuart. I just want to know. Have you . . . a daughter?"

"No. What of it?"

"You have a sister, haven't you?"

"Yes, three of them. What of that?"

"Suppose," said the private secretary deliberately, "that a man came behind one of your sisters in an office and whispered: 'You can go a long way with me.' What would you do to a man like that? Do I make *myself* clear?"

He was surprised, but not unruffled. He swung his stick a moment and smiled as before.

"Oh, I don't know. My sisters have always been able to take care of themselves, I imagine."

"But have they had to sit in an office where everyone can come in and feel their way through their pride and modesty and make insulting proposals that they had to listen to or leave . . . and drive a sacrificing mother back to the washtub? Mr. Stuart," she cried spirit-

edly, "did your mother ever work at a wash-tub?"

"No, of course not . . . but I can't help that."

"Mr. Stuart, did you ever *have* a mother!" Blue eyes now were a glittering gray. She couldn't see, but *felt* the flaming carmine of her cheeks. The man of the world lost just a little of his urbanity.

"See here," he answered tartly, "don't cross examine me! Most girls are glad and grateful if a man pays them a little attention . . . a man who isn't a fright to look at; who has a little money to gratify some of their fancies; who has some position and *some* class."

"In that event," she countered quietly, "I have much to be thankful every day."

"Oh, I see. There have been others here not so . . . so conservative as you would wish."

"We won't talk about that, if you please."

Stuart's vanity had been somewhat jostled, otherwise he would have terminated the conversation at this point. But this calm indifference coming from a girl of the tenements

was an affront. Egoism was not dominant among the lawyer's faults and in this case, perhaps, it was excusable. But his customary suavity and his concomitant tact forsook him.

"Well," he said, "I'll mention no names, but you're not the first stenographer that ever worked in this pretty little room. And I think I can truthfully say they have not all been so particular or so cautious."

"No, I suppose not. But why do you talk to me about these things? You're Mr. Scott's lawyer not mine."

The ingenuousness of this reply struck home. Whether she was cognizant of it or not Gertrude's words had touched a sensitive spot. Zealousness for guarding client's secrets is an unwritten law with attorneys.

"Oh, you're worrying about Mr. Scott, aren't you?" Stuart blurted. "I'm his lawyer all right but he seems to have a more eloquent defender in you." He made a sweeping obeisance to her. "Have you any reason to protect Mr. Scott's equities so stoutly? Has he acquired any rights in you. . . . Yet?"

This thrust was vitriolic and brought the

flush to Gertrude's cheeks again. Scott's return checked her reply.

"Well, Stuart," he laughed, "I have been infringing on your profession again. I guess I have settled the case out of court—the matter I just spoke to you about concerning Simpson.

"Yes? Glad to hear it, but there are one or two little details to be considered in the affair we were discussing before you went out."

The lawyer looked at his client and then at the private secretary in a way that he again desired privacy. Scott laughed good naturedly.

"Mr. Stuart and I are veritable conspirators," he said; "I guess you'll have to excuse us again, Miss Meyer, till we settle this little matter."

"What are the details, Stuart?" he asked, when the girl had gone out.

"Well, primarily it is a little matter of $5,000. I want to take the money back with me. Auntie is waiting in my office now with an itching palm. And if I might suggest it, the cash will be better than a check . . . from your standpoint."

Scott touched a button and summoned his factotum.

"Crane, have we $5,000 in currency?"

"I think so, sir."

"Bring it to me."

"Better have your stenographer write a receipt," said the lawyer.

"Not *my* stenographer, Stuart. I don't want that young woman to know anything about my personal affairs, you know."

"But," laughed the lawyer, "your stenographers usually *are* your personal affairs. It's harmless anyway, she won't know what it is all about."

Stuart moved to the door.

"Miss——" he called, and Gertrude reappeared. And with her came Crane, who with his wanted energy had secured from the safe such currency as his chief needed. Scott took the bills and ran through them. As he finished he glanced up and saw his private secretary. He waved a hand of dissent.

"He didn't mean you, Miss Meyer. He meant that good looking smart alec. Crane, ask Miss Wiggins to come in."

"Yes, sir."

The clerk returned with Miss Wiggins, after Gertrude had withdrawn. He hovered about the door until Scott, glowering at him, said:

"Well, what is it, Crane? Isn't that all?"

"Yes, s—ir. But what will I charge this to?"

"To my personal affairs—I mean my personal account!"

Stuart laughed outright, and the "good looking smart alec" joined him. Scott rose and spoke with some austerity. The levity of the other two didn't seem to strike him.

"Miss Wiggins, you will please write a few words for Mr. Stuart, on the machine."

The girl moved quickly to Gertrude's desk and, with a business like promptitude, adjusted the paper. Stuart moved over beside her.

"The date, please," she said.

The keys trotted off this injunction, almost as soon as he had finished it. He continued: "Received of Jerrold R. Scott for use of Estelle Wilson, a minor, the sum of $5,000 payment in full and lieu of any and all claims for

damages to date, and in settlement of any or all such claims, or claims of any and all nature to date.

"Dotted lines for signature, please."

The impromptu secretary drew out the sheet and handed it to Stuart. And quite unostensibly she left a carbon copy on the desk.

"Thank you," said the lawyer.

"You're welcome," she answered. At the door she turned and glancing from Scott to Stuart: "It's a pleasure to write a letter in his *private* office. I enjoyed it very much, I assure you." She left a rippling laugh in the wake of her exit.

"Damn that girl!" exclaimed Scott, as the door closed. He got up and approached Stuart with the money in his hand.

"Here you are; guess this completes the deal."

"Yes," the lawyer laughed, "I guess it does." He stepped to the door and recalled his secretary. He linked arms with the lawyer and accompanied him out to the elevator.

Gertrude seated herself at her desk and—

saw the carbon copy that Miss Wiggins had intentionally left behind. She heard footsteps in the hall and slipped the paper into a drawer.

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CHAPTER XV

BRIDGING THE GULF

INSTEAD of the ogre there came the prince.

"Hello, Gertrude," said Jack. "I saw the governor and Stuart going down the hall just now so I thought I would peek in for a moment. I have something awfully important to tell you," he laughed, "confidential, too."

"What is it?" she asked, smiling up at him.

"I like you more and more every minute."

"Mr. Scott!"

She glanced quickly towards the door.

"I don't care," he said, coming nearer. "Someone will have to know, pretty soon, anyhow. I'm ready to explode any minute. Ever since we had that dandy ride I haven't thought of anything else. It seems as if it gets harder and harder for me to have a word with you here. Please let me take you out for another little drive. I'm sure I haven't done

anything to offend you and yet you seem to get farther and farther away from me. Please don't misunderstand me. I know you have every reason to do so; our relations here—they're very likely to influence you, but honestly, Gertrude, I do so want to be with you some. I am not a flirt and I don't believe you think I am. Do you?"

"No, I don't, Mr. Scott."

"Then why won't you let me see you?"

The tender importunities of this boy wrote themselves into her brain and heart. They gave being to an ecstasy such as she had never known; they prompted ineffable dreams; a sublime vision. She longed to reach out and clasp the tangible source of this vision. He was knocking at the door of the sanctuary with a clear, firm appeal for admittance. No insiduous approach, no disguise of pseudo solicitude.

Yet she dared not claim her own. There was the gaping chasm of caste and the realities of this chasm had been revealed to her in all their nakedness by Scott and his esteemed legal aide.

"He doesn't want a stenographer, he wants a playmate." This was the omen of the sapient Miss Wiggins and so far this young woman's prophecies had been fulfilled.

Where lay the difference between the father and the stepson?

"He doesn't want a mate, he wants a playmate." Merely a slight revision of the warning; so like the girl's words that she might have uttered them. Perhaps, she would have if she had known. How was Gertrude to distinguish? Was there any distinction? Only her heart assured her that there was. She gave voice to her misgivings.

"Why should you want to see me, Mr. Scott . . . any place, but here? There isn't anything in common between us. You're a millionaire, or the son of one. I am a working girl—a very humble one in all but title. I like you, yes. What girl in my position wouldn't? But you see . . . you must see in your other life . . . away from the office, I mean . . . hundreds of girls whom you like better than me.

"Oh, I know what you will say," she added

quickly to forestall his protest. "They all say it. I am so different; so unworldly; so refreshing—"

She broke off, her cynical diatribe unfinished. The tense, searching look of his clear boyish eyes enthralled her. Her last words had gone unheard. He had caught a phrase that was poignantly significant.

"They all say it?" he echoed. "What do you mean? Who? Where?"

He linked these words now with those torturous innuendos of Crane. He had forgotten them almost, or put them out of mind, for when Scott came back that afternoon he had returned alone. He told his stepson that the private secretary was not feeling well and had been given a half holiday. That was the natural explanation and Jack accepting it at last downed his suspicions. Now the memory of those disturbing doubts was revived. Had the enigmatical Crane known something after all, or had he surmised correctly? Jack looked at Gertrude for an answer. She had realized instantly the hazard her blunder involved and was prepared.

"Oh, I don't mean anyone in particular," she answered; "I mean that's just the general trend of talk that a working girl hears in offices."

"But you haven't worked any place but here."

"No, I haven't, but a great many persons come and go here even if it is a private office."

"Mr. Stuart, for instance?"

Memory of the lawyer's contumely was fresh in her mind and it brought the flush of shame to her cheeks again. For an instant the reply "yes," hovered on her lips, but she choked back the word.

"Please don't cross examine me this way, Mr. Scott," she evaded. "You haven't any right to."

He bent down and looked into her eyes.

"No, I suppose not," he said. "But I wish I did have. Are you sure I haven't just a *little* more right than others?" His voice came to her like the strains of distant music; some sympathetic melody floating through and around the barriers she had raised. The material fixtures of her environment danced in

accompaniment to this rhythm. Walls, desks and chairs were blended with it.

She felt the pressure of an arm about her shoulders; the sense of a warm breath meeting hers, and then—the words:

"Girlie, I want you!"

The soft melody ceased with the clang of a cymbal. The verdure of an Eden became the scorched and barren desert.

She sprang from him and stood glaring with back to wall.

"What? You—too! I thought you were too young; too clean!"

He was stunned. He stood still, surveying in a helpless, boyish way this riot of infuriated resentment.

"Gertrude," he said softly, "what do you mean?"

"I mean what you mean!" she blurted. "I mean that you want me like all men want me. Why don't you ask me to lunch—in a nice, quiet place? We could have a booth, you know. Privacy, privacy, privacy! That's the watchword of you and yours!"

The scorn and fury had run its course. This was the Rubicon. The awakening from the last dream; the severing of the last shred. This boy whom she had trusted and idolized had dropped the mask and revealed like all the rest. A mist blinded her blazing eyes; tears came.

He sprang to her and seized the now inert hands.

"Gertrude!" he cried. "I don't want you to go to lunch with me. I don't want to take you into any booth. I want to marry you!"

"*Marry* me?" she gasped.

"Yes, marry you! Here, now—anywhere!" He stepped back and released her hands. "Love doesn't take an age in the making, Gertrude. I've loved you—oh, ever since I saw you, I guess. . . . I didn't intend to . . . tell you like this. I've thought and dreamed a regular little fairy book romance. I've proposed to you in a hundred places; in the park, or beside that big statue; your home, if I could find it. Anywhere, but here. But you have kept me away; you've avoided me and just now

I knew why. I couldn't stand it, that's all. You'll forgive me, won't you, Gertrude? You'll trust me now . . . please!"

"Yes, I'll trust you," she answered and he clasped her in his arms. He kissed her and stepped back with the radiant face of a school boy.

"I'm going to tell the governor," he cried. "Going to tell him right now!"

But she grasped his arm.

"No, no! Please don't . . . not now."

"Why not?" he urged. "He'll have to know it. The sooner the better."

"No," she insisted, "I wish you wouldn't. Besides," she added, smiling up at him, "you know you haven't anything to tell him. I haven't promised anything."

"But you will . . . you will! I promise you."

"Maybe," she agreed. "But you won't tell —yet. You know we might read from that fairy book . . . awhile."

"All right, honey, and we'll start to-night. I'll wait till I see you go out and pick you up

at—the corner drugstore." He kissed her quickly and skipped to the door. "I'd better get back on the job. If the governor keeps finding me here, I'll *have* to tell."

CHAPTER XVI

A NEW DILEMMA FOR PAUL

JACK found Gertrude awaiting him in the same trysting place as Scott had chosen on the day of the first luncheon. She dreaded the place and would have demurred at going there if Jack had given her a chance. But he had rushed out to his office and left her no alternative, but to disappoint him. That she had no desire to do. In truth, she was as eager to keep the appointment as he was. But the associations of the place upset her and her agitation was in evidence when the boy arrived.

"Oh, Jack, I shouldn't have met you here," she exclaimed nervously.

Having no knowledge of her scruples the boy chafed a little at this continued indication of fear and uncertainty regarding him. But he laughed and led her quickly to the machine.

"A meeting of this kind is of your own making, little girl," he said. "If I had my way I would be in your home this evening and your mother should know my intentions and our plans. What do you say, let's go there now?"

"Oh, no, Jack . . . not yet . . . please."

"Very well," he declared resignedly. "Whatever you wish, honey, only this can't do for long. It won't do for you and your mother to be living in two or three rooms when the man you are going to marry is enjoying the comforts of a modern palace."

"Am I going to marry you?" she asked coyly. "I didn't know we had settled that."

"But we have, honey, just as thoroughly as if we were heading for the minister's right now."

She cuddled cosily by his side in silence letting her childish untutored mind ramble at will through the realm of this dream that was real yet seemed so unreal. She forgot Scott, the environment of her own humble home, the incongruity of it all—everything, and drank in full of the cup of this new found joy. In the park Jack took the East drive

and they whirled by the mansions that lined the avenue.

"There, honey," he exclaimed suddenly, "if you won't let me see your home I'll show you mine. There it is." He pointed to an edifice in brown stone that loomed big and imposing on a corner in the seventies.

"Oh . . . isn't it grand?"

In this quiet girlish adulation there was mingled a note of something else—fear; the realization of the aliency of this big house and all it stood for. The contemplation of it acted like a dash of cold spray on the febrile imaginings of her mind. It brought her quickly to a sense of her own inadequacies and of the gulf that lay between her and the boy.

"Jack," she said timorously as she pressed his arm—"if you married me you wouldn't live there, would you?"

"Why no, honey," he laughed, "we'd have a home of our own, I guess. I've been building one in my mind for two weeks."

"Like that?"

"No, maybe not exactly like that. But it would seem just as fine to us."

She stole her hand away from his and looked up at him.

"Jack dear, you know if you married me it wouldn't be the same . . . with you. You know you haven't thought about it all . . . what it means to you and your parents. You know they wouldn't accept me. I'd be cutting you off from everything in the world that you've been accustomed to and that men give up their lives for."

For an answer he stooped and pressed his face to hers.

"This is what men give up their lives for, honey; not for buildings and for what you mean. Don't talk as if we had a funeral ahead of us instead of a whole life time of happiness."

"It's wonderful, I know, Jack. But I can't quite make up my mind it's real. Things don't happen this way except in story books. I've read them and gloried in them, but now when I'm like a part of them it doesn't seem the same. You're such a boy, dear. Still, I don't believe you know anything more about life than I do. And I've got most of my

knowledge in the last four weeks. You haven't thought it out much and I have. I've thought of it even before you told me you loved me. Can't you imagine it in the society columns, 'John Scott, foster son of Jerrold R. Scott, the millionaire importer, was married at noon yesterday in St. Bartholomew's to Miss Gertrude Meyer of 2624 Second Avenue. The bride relinquishes her duty as private secretary of the elder Scott and the couple will leave at once for a honeymoon trip in southern Europe. On their return—"

He pressed his hand gently over her mouth.

"Stop it, Gertie," he laughed, "you mustn't speak so lightly of our love. I have thought of the consequences of our marrying some, but it doesn't make any difference. I want you above everything else in the world. Besides you are borrowing trouble. You don't know what kind of a mother I've got. She cares more for my happiness than anything else on earth and she can't help loving you when she sees you. And I guess it won't be so very hard to make the governor come around to her way of thinking. He usually does.

"That honeymooning in southern Europe is a good idea, honey. I hadn't thought of it. Now we'll just put that in the plans, right now. It will give you a chance to see that wonderful world you seem to stand so much in awe of. Yes," he cried enthusiastically, "it's a great idea. Europe is just the place for it. It'll be a fine finishing school for you. I haven't been there for four years myself, but I can show you—oh, so many wonderful things. We'll be the happiest honeymooners you ever heard of. We can have a quiet marriage and start right away. The governor won't know his little private secretary when we get back and your mother won't know you either, honey. I guess you'll learn French and Italian and all that, and you'll know all there is to know about those dear society ways."

His tone revealed some innate scorn for the ways of his kith and kin. It was in truth a heritage from the sturdy sire whom to him was a vague memory of the past. Barker had been everything but a silk stocking and his views on the real values of life had been passed along to his son.

"Do you know, Gertie," Jack added, "I don't go in very much for that society stuff. I've seen just enough of it to get along with a little less of it. My sister and her dear affianced can uphold the family honor in that respect and I'll attend to keeping up our reputation for making money.

"Oh, you don't know about Josephine, do you?" he added; "well, she's going to be married, too, Gertrude. She's just your age. I've never told her about you, honey, but I'm going to to-night. It'll be great to let her in on our secret because she's just become engaged herself. They're crazy about each other, Gertie. Joe's a thoroughbred of the right kind. She's in for society and all that up to her neck but she knows now there are other things that count for more in life than tango teas and coming-out parties. Up to a couple of weeks ago she didn't have anything on her mind but this forthcoming début, but now all she talks about is Paul—that's her affianced."

"Oh," the girl answered excitedly. "Let me think a minute. Oh! I believe I've seen him

then, Jack. He came to call on your father just about a week ago."

"Yes, and he had a very successful visit, for it's all settled—Joe's affair. I was just a little bit surprised at the ease with which they maneuvered it. That encourages me. The governor never seemed to go into ecstasies over Paul, but he switched right about face over night and he had to make some allowances, too. Paul's a good chap, but the kind that never earned a cent in his life and never will. So I guess if Joe can get around J. R. so easily I can, too. Just put worries of every kind out of your head, honey. Everything in our case is subservient to the one big thing, and that is we love each other and are going to get married. It doesn't make any difference what anybody else thinks about it except you. I know what I think and I know what I am going to do."

His persistent optimism could not help but influence her. She became imbued with some of the courage of his own conviction and was wafted again into her dream of content from which she had been rudely awakened. They

had traveled through the park and were returning by the West drive. The short day of early December was at its end. Under the big fur robe she nestled to him envying the warmth of the heavy ulster he wore. She wasn't dressed for an outing in the bleak December evening as he was.

"Jack dear," she whispered timorously, "it's lovely here and I'm just frightfully happy, but —I'm nearly frozen."

"Well, she just can't freeze any more," he murmured, pressing her to him, "we'll fix that right away."

He swerved the big car round to the left and shot it up the incline to the Casino. "Let's go in here a minute, honey," he said, as he brought the machine to a stop. "You can have a cup of tea or something, and I'll have —something else."

"Lunch?" she queried lightly.

"No, not lunch." But the true levity of her question was lost to him.

Inside an energetic usher tried to lead them the length of the room, but Jack designated a table near the door and led Gertrude to it.

He sat facing the room and Gertrude fronted the other patrons of the place. He ordered a hot toddy for himself and without even submitting her to the necessity of a refusal instructed the waiter to bring some tea and cakes.

They were enjoying the comforting warmth of these refreshments when Gertrude suddenly leaned forward and whispered: "Jack, look! There's Paul . . . your sister's fiancé now."

"How do you know?"

"I saw him, I told you. Look!" under her breath: "He's turning about now."

Jack cocked his head around in time to meet the curious gaze of young Montgomery. The prospective brother-in-law's smile denoted something more than mere recognition and greeting. "She seems to be in favor with Scott & Son," was his mental tabulation. "Must be a very attractive girl."

Paul's companion this time was an acquaintance of himself and Jack's of the same sex, so there was none of the mutual embarrassment he had experienced at Kahn's. He was not so much surprised in the present case as he

had been before. But for the recent culmination of a happy event in his life he might have been in the same boat himself. But the humor of the situation struck him keenly. Father and son; business partners, yet apparently rivals for the regard of this young private secretary. He could scarcely refrain from divulging the secret to his companion, but that wouldn't be fair in view of the tacit bond of silence between him and Scott, the elder. He and his friend were ready to leave before Jack and Gertrude, but Paul lit another cigarette and persuaded his companion to tarry to save Jack the embarrassment of a meeting when they passed out.

Lacking the incentive for such embarrassment as had caused his stepfather to choke and hide behind a napkin, Jack had no intention of smuggling Gertrude away. In fact, he rather welcomed the opportunity for introducing her to a prospective member of the family.

"Wait just a minute, honey," he said, as they got up, "I want you to meet Paul." He stepped briskly over to the table, nodded to

Montgomery's companion, whom he knew but slightly, and with a polite "beg pardon" for the interruption escorted his sister's fiancé to where Gertrude was waiting.

"Miss Meyer, Mr. Montgomery," he announced, then looking at Gertrude, "Paul's going to be one of the family before long and I should like very much for you to know each other." He had intended to add "on the same basis," but the mute appeal from Gertrude's eyes and her flushed cheeks checked him.

Paul spoke some formal pleasantry, and took Gertrude's hand. He was too well drilled in the ways of his kind to betray surprise at the unusual form of Jack's introduction and at the girl's evident embarrassment. He was cognizant at once that there was some latent significance behind his friend's words. Whimsical and just a bit uncouth was the thought that flashed through his mind: "Jack's fallen harder than the old man." But he smoothed over the awkwardness of the moment with some polite speech and bade them adieu.

"Goodness, honey," Jack exclaimed as they passed out, "what came over you? I was going to let Paul know right there how matters stood between us, but you scared the words out of my mouth."

"Well, aren't you glad I did? Surely, Jack, you wouldn't want to be telling outsiders before you've said anything to your mother or father."

"Yes, I guess you're right," he sighed as they clambered into the machine. "But Paul's scarcely an outsider. I would like to have Joe hear you say that, honey," he added suddenly. "Let me tell mother and the governor to-night. What's the use of delaying any longer?"

"Please, Jack . . . no; not yet. Let me decide that; won't you?" she pleaded. "We've only known each other four weeks. Surely, we can wait . . . a little while."

Again he yielded, but with a reluctant sigh. "All right, Gertie. I'll grant you a respite, but it won't be a very long one, and I'll only give you that on your word that you'll see me every evening like this. Promise."

"Yes, I promise," she agreed softly—"every evening that I can. Now we've got to hurry, or mother'll think Mr. Scott's becoming a hard task master."

The boy at her side little knew how hard a one he was, or just why she insisted on postponing the hour of their own happiness, if she loved him—and he was sure she did. In reality, the curbing of his own impatience was but a little task compared to the problem that confronted Gertrude. Such ideas of delightful romance as she had gleaned from books were tempered hugely by her experiences of the last four weeks. The incident of Stuart's advances, especially, had been to her an episode. He had none of the shallow excuses for familiarity that Scott had, yet in a few words he had revealed the utter insignificance with which men of his type and standing regarded girls of hers. It was for this light in which she and her kind stood in the eyes of others, and not any sense of actual inferiority, that made her blush for the boy who really loved her. That he would be humiliated there could not be the shadow of a doubt and prob-

ably the consequences would be graver than that.

Somehow, in some way, though she knew not just how, she must raise the standard of her own self-respect and gain the respect of others before she accepted the reward that one man's love held out to her. She had disposed of Stuart effectually and yet, he had failed to understand. Manlike he had attributed her chagrin to loyalty to Scott, or his stepson. She had wounded his vanity, but his sense of pride and honor had gone unscathed. That was the tragedy of it. Still, he *was* disposed of and now there was Scott. She must make her stand with him and put an end to the luncheons, and she must do it without reference to Jack.

She saw now the value of Catherine Wiggins' warning and the foolishness of her childish resentment. Though it was hard to admit it, she realized that in these matters of the world Catherine was much better qualified to advise her than her mother and she resolved to seek her counsel this time where before it had been thrust upon her.

CHAPTER XVII

ADVICE AND FUDGE

IT was nearly seven o'clock when Gertrude reached her home and her mother had kept supper waiting half an hour.

"So, Gertie, it's every day longer you work now. He must be a very busy man that Mr. Scott, that he keeps you so late. Millionaires, I thought, had easier hours."

"Oh, he doesn't always stay as long as I do," she evaded truthfully. "Sometimes he gives me a lot of letters and I have to finish them after he's gone." To escape further explanations for the moment she hurried to the kitchen and dished out the steaming noodles and kraut while Rudie, the younger of the boys, clung about her skirts and followed her to the table. Her mother came with the big tin pot of coffee and a pan of Kuchen.

Gertrude joked with her brothers, questioned Heine about his studies and simulated

a cheerfulness that she did not feel. She wanted to prepare her mother for the project of her departure after dinner. She had determined at all costs to visit Catherine at the Y. W. C. A. home and take the older girl into her confidence. It would be the first time she had gone out alone that way and she anticipated maternal objection.

Mrs. Meyer was one of the many thousands who see in natural recreations of youth a hundred pitfalls. She believed, perhaps not without cause, that the only place for a girl of Gertrude's age was home, yet she had no hesitancy in letting her daughter go alone into the offices of countless strangers, so long as it was daytime. There are not a few like Mrs. Meyer who think his Satanic Majesty is full brother to the night hawk, seeking diurnal seclusion in the hours of light and venturing forth in quest of victims only in the dark. It is through such foolish ignorance as this that the monarch of the other regions prospers. Is there a more subtle weapon to allay the fears and misgivings of the uninitiated than Scott's "What, in broad daylight?" The

devil has no union hours. He moves in the glitter of sunshine as well as under the mantle of darkness.

After the simple meal Gertrude made known her intention at once.

"I have to go out, to-night, mamma," she said boldly. "To the home of one of the girls in the office."

Mrs. Meyer eyed her sharply. "You go out . . . alone . . . at night, Gertie?"

"Yes, I must, mamma. She gets to the office much earlier than I do and I want to see her about something first." Knowing her mother's views and how reluctant she was to venturing out herself, Gertrude made bold to forestall refusal. "You can come with me, mamma, if you want to," she added.

"Where is it?"

"Over on the West Side at the Y. W. C. A. home."

The mother's owl-like observance continued for a moment and Gertrude met her stare.

"No, Gertie," she assented at length, "if it's about your work you go, but you play me no foolishness. I wait for you. How long?"

"I don't know, mamma. It's on Twenty-third Street and nearly over to the river. It'll take me two hours, anyway, I guess."

She hurried out and half an hour later rang the bell at the big institution where young women of the metropolis abide immune from the perils and wiles of a pursuing sex.

"Just have a seat, my dear," said a benign white aproned matron in answer to her inquiry. "I'll see if Miss Wiggins is in." She came back and escorted Gertrude through immaculate halls and up a prophylactic staircase to a room on the third floor.

"Why, hello, child," greeted the smiling Catherine; "what on earth brings you here? Come in; I'm glad to see you, whatever it is."

Gertrude looked about with unconcealed admiration at the attractive little room, with its white enameled bedstead and its snow white counterpane, the stationary washstand of porcelain, the polished hardwood floor with its new rag rug, everything scrupulously clean, a veritable Valhalla for female purity and all in striking contrast to the squalor of

her own tenement home. Her survey at an end she looked up shyly at the older girl.

"What a lovely place you have. It must be . . . awfully expensive."

"Three dollars a week, girlie. I spend about four for my meals so you see I'm saving a fortune. But it's better than sponging on the folks at home. Here, let me take your wrap and hat. It's warm in here and you'll take cold if you don't take them off. What's on your mind, girlie?"

It was hard for Gertrude to tell. It had seemed easy enough when she arrived at the hasty decision to enlist the aid of this experienced fellow-worker, but now that the time had come she felt like a maid at her first confessional. But she had come for a purpose and Catherine's smile invited confidence. She called up all her courage.

"Well, Miss Wiggins," she began, "I want to admit that some of the advice you gave me was . . . good and I'm afraid I am in need of more."

Catherine had established Gertrude in the only rocker she boasted. She sat opposite

her in a little stiff back chair she had drawn from the desk. She had prepared herself as usual for an evening at home and in a cheap negligee of colored muslin, but embellished by some blue satin trimmings, she made a very pretty picture and to Gertrude who had at first regarded her as a very prying sort of a person and rather disagreeable, she seemed now a very superior kind of a girl. Indeed, Catherine Wiggins was pretty and as Scott pertinently put it she could have been an amanuensis or a private secretary with very little contriving, if she chose. She smiled pleasantly now and spoke with more familiarity than her visitor had shown, determined to put her at her ease.

"Advice, Gertie, is the easiest thing in the world to give and the hardest to take. It's like medicine. The trouble is we don't begin taking it soon enough. What's the matter, have Mr. Scott's attentions become too fatherly? Have they gone beyond the luncheon stage?"

"You . . . know?" The words came

slowly and low and Gertrude's long black lashes drooped.

"Why, of course, girlie. Everyone in the office knows you've been going out to lunch with that old Lothario for a month. That is, everyone but that good looking stepson of his. No one seems to have the nerve to tell *him,* for he doesn't invite familiarity and goodness knows, Miss Williams would be equal to the job if anyone in the office would."

A deep flush at the reference to Jack added to Gertrude's confusion.

"It's about him . . . about Mr. Scott . . . the younger Mr. Scott," she stammered, "that I came to see you."

"O-h! I see. Troubles never come singly, eh, little one?"

"I don't know whether you'd call it trouble in this case." The flush deepened, but there was just a trace of pride in the younger girl's tone as she blurted: "Mr. Scott . . . Mr. Jack Scott wants me to marry him."

A low whistle, then a rippling laugh answered her. "Well, you *have* progressed."

She leaned over and took Gertrude's hand. "He has told you that?"

"Certainly." She felt chafed a little at Catherine's manner. There was the same note of skepticism in the girl's words that Gertrude had heard when she told of Scott's kindness and interest in her. "Surely, he told me, Miss Wiggins. You don't think I dreamed it."

"No, but I think he did. Or else it's the same, old story. Now see here, girlie; before we go any further, if you want my friendship and advice just forget that I'm Miss Wiggins. I'm that on Broadway and to most men except my father, but to those who see me here, I'm Catherine, so please don't be so formal. Besides, it isn't becoming to you. Tell me, now when did Mr. Jack Scott honor you with this . . . proposal?"

"To-day. He's been awfully nice before . . . whenever he came into the private office, you know. And about two weeks ago he passed me on Fifth Avenue when I was on my way home and just made me get into his car. After that he was just as nice as ever, but I

just couldn't go with him again. He asked me and goodness knows I wanted to, but—"

"There was Mr. Scott," Catherine interrupted.

"Exactly. Oh, you seem to understand everything. But that's just the way it was. And now—"

"There is still Mr. Scott."

"Yes."

The older girl pressed Gertrude's hand and got up. She stepped lightly to the closet and came back with a little sauce pan. "Excuse me, girlie," she laughed, "this is a serious matter and I want something to settle my mind. Besides, I'm fudge hungry. Do you like it?"

"Oh, I'd love it, I guess, if it's candy. I don't believe I ever had any, though."

"You never had any fudge? Well, you *are* different. No wonder millionaires' sons fall in love with you. Now you just watch me and you'll see what an expert a lonesome Y. W. C. A. girl can become at this business."

She set Gertrude to work grating the chocolate and from a little box on the window sill brought in some milk and butter. With deft

and experienced hands she stirred the mixture and passing it to Gertrude secured, from its hiding place on the closet shelf a little electric stove.

"You see, I have all the conveniences of home here," she laughed, "but I have to make a secret of some of them."

The molten butter sizzled in the pan and soon the odor of the concoction filled the little room. Catherine threw open the window and set the pan on the ledge. She brought it back presently and stirred and whipped it into a creamy mass after which she cut it into little squares and passed one of them to her guest on the end of a knife. It was Gertrude's first indulgence in fudge and she nibbled at it with delight.

"There, I knew you'd like it," her hostess commented. "Now we can talk . . . of your fairy story, for I'll have to call it that until I hear more of it. I'm afraid I've become awfully hardened and practical, Gertie. You don't think I am suspicious, or prudish as on the day I first talked to you, do you?"

"No, I've had some bitter examples of the

truth. But, Catherine," she added plaintively, "I'm just as much in that old man's power as I was before you warned me. It's the position . . . the ten dollars every Saturday that has meant an end of misery in my home . . . and I just can't give it up."

"What, with the prospects of becoming a millionaire's bride?"

"That's just what makes it worse. I oughtn't to marry Jack now and I know it. It would turn his family against him and ruin him, and—I do love him."

"Yes, you love him, but are you sure he loves you? Girlie," Catherine exclaimed fervently, leaning over and clasping the girl's hand, "be careful. He's rich too, and wants what he wants. He's told you he wants to make you his wife, but how do you know he would?"

"Oh, I do know it, Catherine. If you look at it like that, you're all wrong and can't help me at all. Why, he's wanted to go to my mother and tell her so and he wanted to tell his people to-night. He would take me to his own home and tell them everything if I would

let him. But I can't let him, don't you see? I couldn't bear it in front of that old man. It's torture enough for me now to face them separately and—oh, I don't know what on earth I'm to do!" And Gertrude emphasized the painfulness of her dilemma with needed tears.

"There, don't be silly, little girl," Catherine comforted. She leaned over and put a soft arm around her little guest. "It's nothing to cry over when the son of one of the richest men in New York wants to marry you. If it's as good as that, I wouldn't give him up for the world. You probably wouldn't succeed if you tried. Look, girlie, there's only one thing you can do and must do, and that is what I told you before. You must stop! Stop the attentions of that foolish old man. Stop them to-morrow. When he asks you to go to lunch with him again just don't. Be as nice as you can about it, but be yourself. Maybe he likes you so much he won't discharge you and more probably he will. But you can stop him before it's too late—if it isn't too late."

"It isn't."

"Well, then don't have any more foolishness about it. Have it over and done with, then you can look your fairy Prince in the face. There's a way to do it—a way for every decent girl to remain decent if she wants to and knows her business. Look at me. You know, or ought to know, what that old rascal thinks of me and I'm sure I'm not starving to death."

"But you're different. You can get another position, or fifty of them and I can't."

"You'll get another and everyone you get you'll gain experience of the useful kind. It won't be long before you won't be dependent on your looks for a job. And I guess," she added a little sadly, "that you won't have to be looking for them long when the young junior partner finds you're gone. Come, cheer up now, little girl. Take my advice and my good wishes and send that old idiot about his business—without compromise."

"I'll try to-morrow," Gertrude promised, as she rose and made ready to depart. "If I think of you, I guess I'll succeed. You cer-

tainly give me courage now: If it holds out I don't know how I'll ever repay you."

"That's easy, girlie," the counselor assured. "Just send me an invitation to the wedding."

CHAPTER XVIII

SUB-ROSA: ENTRE NOUS

THERE dawned now in the Scott mansion an era of exceeding cheer and peace. For a fortnight Jack's usually buoyant spirits had been dulled by some impenetrable pall. Even the joyful tidings conveyed by his sister when she blushingly unmasked the secret of her troth to Paul had met a funereal reception. He was glad, of course. He liked Montgomery and loved his sister. But he had been so serious about it all.

"Are you sure he loves you, Joe," he had asked, "and that you love him?"

"Why, certainly, you goose," she laughed. "Don't you suppose you can tell when you love somebody?"

"How *do* you?" he persisted.

"Why, you . . . just do, that's all!"

Which being a woman's answer and some-

what incontrovertable covered the case pretty thoroughly, at that.

"Yes, I guess that's right, Joe," he had told her. "There are many little things, I suppose, that go to establish the conviction, but after all they're just incidents. The main thing is that you know, and I imagine you don't need any prompter. But, tell me, Joe," he added, groping for some straw in the receding flood of his own hopes, "how did you know that Paul loved you?"

"Why, he told me, foolish."

Her answer was the obvious and he laughed in spite of himself.

"I know," he said, "but before that. Didn't you know before he told you?"

"Why, Jack, you're worse than a lawyer. I can't tell you everything I thought or knew. I hoped he did and, you see, he did."

There was some comfort in that even if, in his case, the system had not progressed so favorably or so far.

. . . . . .

Joe was happy. She had passed all the barriers, even that of parental approval, and she

had been not a little surprised at Paul's report of immediate success.

"It took a little tact," he had told her, for why, he reasoned, should he make light of his own accomplishment. He knew he had been under a ban of some kind and Joe would think all the more of him if he assumed the air of a conqueror. If the little affair at Kahn's had anything to do with his bloodless victory over the millionaire it was a skeleton doomed to perennial imprisonment. He was safe.

. . . . . .

So Jack had watched the flower of his sister's content bud and blossom while his own faded and withered away.

Now all was changed. He was as happy in his love as Josephine was in hers.

At dinner that night after his second trip to fairyland evening, Jack's restoration was obvious. He kissed his mother and sister when he came in, talked glibly of affairs at the office and engaged in good natured pleasantries at Josephine's expense.

"I saw Paul this afternoon," he said with a covert wink toward his parents. "He looks

like he'd drawn the first prize in a Mexican lottery. Walks as if he didn't know there was any asphalt under him at all. You'd better keep an eye on him, Joe; put some ballast on him, too, or he'll go right up like one of those toy balloons some day and you'll lose him."

"I guess Joe's the ballast, Jack," laughed his mother. "I don't believe there's much danger of Paul's going anywhere without her."

"You just bet there isn't," the girl confirmed. "If there are any balloon ascensions in order, I'll be right there hanging onto his coattails.

"But, Jack," she added coyly, "that reminds me. Mother and I saw Esther Stuyvesant this afternoon and she asked about you—rather forlornly, didn't you think, mother?"

"Esther is very fond of you, Jack," Mrs. Scott agreed. She spoke slowly and without the spirit of levity that had marked her children's chatter. To her mind Esther Stuyvesant was an enviable product of her type. She could have named no girl in all New York whom she would sooner welcome as her boy's

affianced than this unassuming daughter of an imperious house.

Esther was a rarity. She sprang from the same fountain head and drank at the same well as the rest of her rollicking set, but she drank deeper.

The shallow mountain stream dances on, sparkling in the sunshine, splashing over stones, spreading itself over an aimless waste. It is beautiful to the eye; its rippling music holds the ear. But here and there it winds 'round a cliff and, surging and protesting, eddies its way into a tranquil pool. We halt beside this pool and contemplate its depth. It holds the lure of the unknown. And such was Esther Stuyvesant. Hers was the deeper and subtler shade among a chimera of all colors.

"Couldn't you marry her just for my sake?" Josephine teased. "I'd love Esther as a sister-in-law."

"I'd like to oblige you, Joe, but I've seen girls I like better."

"Who, Madge?"

"Not by a long sight. Madge told me last week she just 'loved' Henry James and I'm

not going to play second fiddle to any highbrow novelist."

"Good!" exclaimed the senior Scott. "You stick to Scott & Son, my boy, and let Joe do the romancing for the present. One engagement at a time is enough for any family. Why, when I was the age of you youngsters marriage was the last thing in the world I thought of. It was work from eight in the morning till five at night and usually more work after dinner."

With a sly smile and a wink Scott looked over at his wife for confirmation of these impeccable qualities of his adolescence.

"Yes, your father is right," she laughed. "Times have changed since we were children."

But in deploring the precociousness of the younger generation they underestimated its perspicacity. Josephine, balancing a grape on her salad fork, set it down again and eyed her father quizzically.

"Tell me, dad," she said, "how old were you when you married mamma?"

Scott assumed an air of deep reflection.

"Let me see. I can't recall exactly—but much older than Jack. I should say about thirty."

"And Jack was six then, so if I'm not mistaken you were twenty-three at the time of your first marriage. 'My,' the girl mimicked, in her droll way, 'how times have changed.'"

They joined in the laugh Scott had courted at his own expense and he held up his hands in mute signal of surrender.

"What's the use," he sighed. "The son is father to the man nowadays and the daughter rules the roost. Jack'll be retiring me from the firm one of these days and I'll be begging for a pension. You won't cut me off entirely, will you, my boy? Or, maybe," he added, glancing from wife to daughter, "Joe will give us a home. We'd better be getting in Paul's good graces, mother. You can't tell what'll happen and parents have to be careful how they impress their children."

"Well, governor," Jack laughed, as they got up, "there's no time like the present and here's a chance for you to make a hit with me right now. I'd like to use the limousine to-

night, if you don't mind. Joe and I here are going to do a little slumming and the nights are cold for the open car. What's the verdict?" he finished. He had winked covertly at his sister before Scott cast an inquiring glance at her. This was Joe's first intimation of the jaunt, but she caught Jack's signal in time to avert showing surprise.

"Slumming?" said Scott, glancing from one to the other. "This is a new departure, isn't it? Where does the diversion take you?"

"I haven't decided exactly, governor, the fact is we haven't quite made up our mind—thought we might take a look at the movies, or maybe, just drive about a bit. The fact is we haven't quite made up our mind. What put it into my head was that Paul told me this afternoon that he and Joe were going to manage to exist this evening without being in each other's company. Don't suppose you and mother care about accompanying us on a trip like this, do you?"

The boy looked at his mother in a way that invited a negative response and she answered:

"No, I guess not, Jack, thank you; speaking for myself, at least, I made about fifteen calls this afternoon, and at two places the hostesses were so untactful and unkind as to be at home and I am about tired out. How about you, Jerrold?"

"I think that I can endure it at home, too, Helen."

He turned to his stepson, "Thank you, Jack, but I guess you and Joe had better run along if you want to. Don't know as I have any use for the car to-night, if I did I wouldn't over look this opportunity to—sort of strengthen my stand in."

Jack's inadvertent use of the word slumming had started a lightning chain of thought in the importer's mind. He had connected in that inexplicable way by which one mind aligns itself with another some thought of his private secretary. And he had divined aright. Jack, unable to keep the secret of his new found happiness entirely within himself, and being honor bound to postpone taking his parents into his confidence, had sought a kin-

dred spirit. He had not only determined to tell Josephine, but with his usual spontaneity he had suddenly harbored a plan for taking his sister to see the girl he loved. He had no more idea of where Gertrude lived than ever and that was what he meant by "slumming." He thought they might sally forth in the car and ride to the elevated station where he and Gertrude had parted. Then by consulting the directory and aided by the astute chauffeur he believed there was a possibility of running down the goal. It was a sort of breach of contract with Gertrude, but he consoled himself with the thought that the end would justify the means.

The limousine was ordered and he bundled Josephine into it.

"Forty-second and Second Avenue, Jim," he directed, "and take your time."

Settled back in the cushions he took his sister's hand and went quickly to the point.

"Joe," he said, "you haven't got a monopoly on all the romance in our family. I'm in love, too."

She drew her fingers from his clasp and

clapped her gloved hands. It was the joyous, impulsive approbation of youth.

"I knew it, Jack!" she cried. "I saw it tonight. You've been such a gloomy raven for the last two weeks that I suspected it, but I wasn't sure whether it was love or the workshop. Oh, isn't it grand!"

"Yes, it's grand, Joe, but it isn't smooth sailing like yours. I'm in love with a stenographer."

"Jack!"

"Oh, you needn't be so surprised and shocked. She's just the finest little girl in the world, and if she'll have me I'm going to marry her, scandal or no. I suppose the governor and mother will make an awful fuss, but I can't help it."

"Where did you meet her?"

"In our office. She's the governor's private secretary."

"Is that more than—than just a stenographer?"

"I'm afraid not. Not in this case, anyway. She came to us only four weeks ago and she's very young. Just your age. I told her to-

day I loved her and I just had to tell someone else. You've got to be my aide. You will, won't you, Joe," he pleaded.

"Of course, Jack."

But her assurance was not particularly convincing. The momentary glamour of his revelation was dimmed by realization of subsequent truths. She would have a stenographer from her father's office as a sister-in-law and her friends and the man she loved herself would be disagreeably compromised. It was romantic enough, to be sure, and would have been just perfectly grand in a novel, but with her own brother the hero of it—that was different.

Hypocrisy is, indeed, a human quality. We halt with worshiping eyes before the painting of a ramshackle shay and its decrepit steed, yet how few of us would drive it. We idolize and almost envy the Nathan Hales who stand in hallowed light of dawn with muskets leveled at the breast, but what one of us would step up and take the martyr's place? There is a vast difference between the contemplation of hardships and the enduring of them.

So now this girl, glorying in youth and the picturesque imaginings of youth, saw the veil lifted and saw the cold actualities that towered over sentimentality. Yes, there would be a fuss. Jack would need aid. But in the instant of this new revelation she determined that such assistance as she could give was his to claim.

"What's her name, Jack?" she asked softly.

"Gertrude Meyer. I don't know where she lives. She hasn't told me. But I'm going to find her to-night if I can. That's why I brought you along. When you've seen her, Joe, you'll love her as much as I do."

"You don't know where she lives?" she echoed incredulously. "Where have you seen her?"

"Only in the office and twice when I took her out in the car. The first time was over two weeks ago. She wouldn't go again till to-day and she wouldn't let me see her any place outside the shop. That's why I've been so blue. But all that's changed now."

The car drew up at the foot of the elevated stairs and Jack jumped out. He found a

drugstore two or three doors away and a city directory and spent fifteen minutes copying down addresses from three pages of Meyers. He gave these to the chauffeur and after exacting the necessary pledge of secrecy told him to make inquiries at the first stop.

"Gertrude Meyer, Jim," he directed; "a girl about seventeen who works as a stenographer, has a widowed mother and too little brothers."

There followed then a futile search of twenty blocks up Second Avenue and adjacent cross streets. Sometimes Jack joined in the quest himself. It was cold and the streets in that densely populated neighborhood were comparatively clear of idlers. Despite that, however, people halted and at times gathered in groups about the big monogrammed limousine. Jack realized now the reason of Gertrude's refusal to let him take her home. When he climbed up the stairs of some poorly lighted tenement he looked back to make sure the faithful Jim was at his post.

After the suspicious looks he encountered, and often surly answers, he complemented

his inquiries with the remark that he was a doctor. This ruse helped to gain him an audience, but it was all without avail. There were Meyer's—hosts of them, but there was a burly father and no widow, or there were no children and, more often, half a score of them. In any and all events there was no Gertrude Meyer employed as a stenographer.

They gave it up at last and drove back to Fifth Avenue. Enroute he told his sister more about the girl. He was eloquent as only a lover can be and by the time they arrived home Josephine was convinced the humble recipient of Jack's affections must be a very wonderful creature; a veritable Cinderella, waiting only for the fairy wand of fortune to make her a princess.

CHAPTER XIX

WANTED: MORE PRIVACY

SCOTT was down the next morning before his private secretary. He had fixed her hours from ten to six because the excursions to Kahn's often delayed her work of the day and kept her later than the regular force. The importer ran through some mail Crane had sorted and left for him. He was nervous and unable to concentrate his mind on correspondence. He found his thoughts wandering to the night before and persistently fastening on the prodigious animation of his stepson. He had pondered over what the boy meant by "slumming" and had even sought to cross-examine Josephine after their return, but she laughingly evaded the issue and declared they had merely been for a ride.

These ruminations in the morning annoyed the millionaire and he was in no blissful mood

when a sharp tap at his door preceded the entrance of Catherine Wiggins.

"Good morning, Mr. Scott. Delightful day."

"Most extraordinary," he assented and continued reading one of his letters. She remained standing till he glanced at her over his eye-glasses.

"Well," he asked, "what can I do for you?"

"I have finished with all the back work Mr. Crane gave me, Mr. Scott. What do you want me to do now?"

"Keep right on the salary role. Crane will supply you with work."

"You mean the position will be permanent?"

The importer laid down his correspondence and eyed her with a serious mien.

"I have intimated as much to you several times, Miss Wiggins, and PLEASE hereafter conduct your business with Crane in the outer office. I am Mr. Scott, of 'Scott & Son' and conduct the firm's affairs, but I employ assistants to look after details of the office work.

This is my *private* office although no one around here seems to be aware of that fact and I beg of you that you will confine yourself to the outer rooms unless I send for you. I have made other provisions for my personal correspondence."

A rippling laugh greeted this rebuke.

"Don't, please, Mr. Scott," the girl said. "I have seen some of it. I suffer from a sense of humor and sometimes I laugh right out . . . in the most inopportune places."

"Don't think I understand you," the millionaire commented icily.

"Oh, you don't have to. Don't worry. I won't walk in on you . . . without knocking. Let's save a lot of waste explaining. You have a private . . . a *very* private secretary; I do the work."

"Some of it."

"Oh, a great deal of it, Mr. Scott. Especially the private letters."

"Well, aren't you satisfied? What do you want, a title?"

The irrepressible Miss Wiggins affected a mock grandiose pose.

"I have one . . . stenographer extraordinary to Crane."

Her effrontery amused the importer despite himself.

"You picked it yourself," he laughed; "everybody in this world picks his or her own title . . . and his or her own station. You don't have to be a stenographer." He smiled up at her in his jaunty way. "You could be a correspondent, an amanuensis or a secretary . . . those are all the same, but all very different from being a stenographer."

"Utterly different," she assented suavely; "several kind hearted gentlemen have tried to elevate me but I'm still a stenographer."

"No accounting for tastes. There are still many people primitive enough to think that the best way to get things is to work for them. Some people fly air-ships . . . some become undertakers . . . and here and there an old-fashioned girl pounds out her destiny on a typewriter, and that's all she puts between herself and being hungry. Why, I knew a girl once—but say, young woman, I'm a busy man! Run along now, please, and take your troubles

to Mr. Crane. Really, you know, you annoy me—and you're too smart. I've discharged girls for being less smart than you are."

"But you won't discharge me because you think I know too much . . . about your private secretary. Don't let that worry you. Fire me and your secret is just as safe as if I remained in your employ. Why don't you fire me, Mr. Scott?"

The importer threw up his hands and laughed.

"You are so damned insolent, I like you! Now, will you please get out of here and . . . stop thinking!"

"Yes, I'm going," she said as she started to the door, "but if you won't let a woman talk, for heaven's sake, let her think."

The door closed quickly a second time after Miss Wiggins' exit and Scott, expectant of another intrusion, looked up and saw his private secretary. He brightened and spoke a cheery "good morning."

"I hope you are feeling fine and fit to-day. It looks like a lot of work and a short luncheon."

She quaked inwardly at the word, but passed it by with a formal greeting and took her place at her machine.

When she was out of Scott's presence, Gertrude's new-found happiness mitigated the tortures she had endured at the importer's hands, and she had determined, without any definite idea of the future, to continue as his amanuensis. To herself she acknowledged a complete surrender of her heart to Jack, but she had not acknowledged it to him and she had not breathed a word of his declaration to her mother.

It was not altogether an unselfish regard for Jack that prompted her silence, either. During the month she had been in this office, under the efficient tutelage of Scott and Miss Wiggins, something of the sophism of the older girl had imparted itself to Gertrude. She wasn't so optimistic as Jack regarding their romance. She was no longer misled by Scott's protestations of paternal care. She knew him now for what he was and she knew his unwonted interest in her would vanish if he thought it was being shared so seriously by his stepson.

She had concluded that her clandestine meetings with Jack were the only ones she could have, now. The fact that he loved her and was near her was something and she must content herself with that.

If Gertrude had but known it, the very thing on which she relied to ameliorate her trials in the private office did but accentuate them. Mere rectitude is a strong defender of chastity but love is a more zealous one. What had been repulsive before was soon to become unbearable, and she had not long to wait to learn the truth.

For a half hour Scott continued reading his letters and jotting down data. When he had finished he leaned back and looked at his secretary, who had sat staring into space across the keys of her typewriter. His contemplation of the girl seemed to inspire him with an idea, for he quickly pressed the button that summoned his chief aide.

"Crane," he said sharply, "Miss Wiggins was in here a moment ago."

"Yes, sir."

"She says she is out of work. What's the

matter, are you all taking a holiday out there?"

"No . . . sir."

"Well, Crane, I don't know what's the matter with you—any deaths in the family, or—births?"

"No . . . sir."

"Well, whatever it is you've got to get it out of your head. Now I've talked about all I'm going to on this matter; as nearly as anybody can conduct affairs out there, you are conducting them and I want to tell you for the last time that this is the office of the president of 'Scott & Son'—his private office. This promiscuous running in and out has got to stop. I've spoken to Miss Wiggins and others concerned, but it doesn't seem to do any good. I can't very well lock the door because of the presence of this young woman. Now I'm going to put it up to you. Either you will impress it on the *hoi polloi* out there that I am entitled to some consideration, or I'll get somebody who will.

"I don't care anything about the hall boy, either. He's supposed to announce anybody

that wants access to this room, but he doesn't do it. I can't be quarreling with office boys and I don't intend to. Just remember that the next person that comes into this room without being properly announced, you're going to answer for it."

"Yes, sir . . . does that . . . include Mr. Jack?"

"Never mind Jack. I'll take care of him. You look out for the rest. That's all. Never saw anything to equal it," he mumbled as Crane made a hasty withdrawal, "that dissertation may gain us a few minutes of privacy, so if you're ready, Miss Meyer, you may take a little dictation."

He gave her a half dozen letters and she went back to her machine. She had transcribed one of them and was making good progress on another when Scott got up and came toward her. He leaned over her shoulder with a smirk of approval.

"My," he complimented, "you *are* improving. I don't believe Miss Wiggins or anyone else could write any better, or faster than you, now."

His praise was gratifying and unconsciously she turned and smiled up at him. Instantly he stooped, seized her hand and pressed his lips to hers. She managed to get to her feet and in the struggle the perfect letter that had merited such praise was brushed to the floor and trampled under foot.

"Let me go! Please let me go!" she cried, wriggling in his embrace. But she was powerless.

"I can't . . . I can't," he murmured. "You're the loveliest when you're fighting and you shan't deny me."

She bent back her head till the words were almost throttled.

"Please! Please! Someone might come in."

Someone did come in and Scott managed to release her just in time. With rare presence he stooped quickly and picked up the soiled letter, and crumpled it in his hand. He leaned over her with frowning brow. Terse and censuring tones followed fast on his amorous pleading.

"And be sure to address that letter to New

Zealand, not Newfoundland, miss. You'll have to exercise more care."

He stepped back to his desk, and the astonished junior partner who had entered unceremoniously, after a furtive look at Gertrude, came forward and laid a cablegram before his stepfather. Scott, who had regained his seat, snatched the message up and jumped to his feet. His fist banged upon the desk.

"This is a fine state of affairs!" he exclaimed; "that Paris man is asleep or full of absinthe like all those frog-eaters. By Jove, this has got to stop! Crane! Crane!" he called and rushed to the hall.

In the moment of Scott's pseudo-outburst Gertrude sat watching him with an agonized look of helplessness and despair. Her face was distorted by her efforts to maintain a deception as adequate as Scott's. But as he rushed out she pressed her handkerchief to her face and dropped her head to her desk, giving vent to pent-up tears. She felt again the pressure of arms but it was a gentle, tender embrace from which she did not shrink.

"Don't cry, girlie," Jack pleaded. "Has

the governor been scolding you so very bad? I know he is in a rotten humor to-day. He was scolding you when I came in, wasn't he?"

She made no answer, but trembling from her sobs she shook her head in dissent.

"Then what are you crying about?"

"Nothing," she murmured.

"There must be *something.*"

For the first time she faced him through her tears:

"Yes, there is . . . something . . . I'm afraid."

"Why can't you tell *me* about it then? Are you afraid of losing your position?"

"No, not afraid of *losing* it . . . afraid of having to leave it. But don't ask me, please! Oh, I just can't give it up, my mother is so happy over it . . . we are all so happy . . ." She raised her hands in gesture of despair. "I just can't . . . I can't . . .!"

"Then why don't you tell me? What is it, Gertrude? I can help you."

"No, you can't. Nobody can help me."

"They can. I can." His gentle tone was now a determined one. "I want you to tell

me what you're crying for." He took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"Don't, Jack," she murmured, "not now, I can't. Maybe I'll tell you by and by. You'd better leave me now. I'm all right."

They heard Scott's voice in the corridor raised in strident pitch of command to Crane. Gertrude pulled away. "Quick," she whispered, "please go! . . . I'll see you to-night."

Scott banged the door after his departing heir. With shrewd appreciation of her feelings he went to his desk and offered no immediate apology.

"That boy is worse than the rest of them," he commented finally. "I guess I'll have to get him a private office."

He took a ball of crumpled paper from his pocket and smoothed it out on his desk; as he contemplated it he smiled in a guilty shame-faced way like a child who, in momentary temper, had trampled on a favorite toy. It paved the way for peace making. He smoothed the sheet again, folded it and unfolded it and got up, holding it towards her.

"I'm sorry, little secretary; especially for

this. It was such a neat, little job it seems almost a sacrilege to have ruined it." He came over to her, still holding out the letter.

"Let me offer you my apologies, Gertrude. I guess you'll have to do it over and you can do the others now. I'm going down to the club for luncheon to-day and may not be back till rather late, but I wish you would wait for me."

CHAPTER XX

THE WOLF'S FANGS

FOR nearly an hour Gertrude sat with her notes untouched. Scott's forcible demand for privacy seemed to have borne fruit. From the lack of it there was now a surfeit of it. To the tortured girl it seemed that she was utterly alone; alone and trapped in the habitat of the wolf.

There was a way of escape but it led past the gravestone of buried hopes and dreams. Three times she started to follow it but each time as she stepped towards the rack for her hat and coat, to flee this place of terrors, the picture of a lowly tenement home with the welcoming faces of her mother and her little brothers flashed before her. It was the picture she had seen a hundred times and it was colored now by brighter tints. If she erased it she erased forever the image of a new born comforter.

If Jack had come to her then she would have told him all but no one came and she trampled down her childish pride and waived aside her fears in new resolve, She started to work on her letters and her diligent application to them relieved her for the moment. She was finishing the last when Scott returned. She switched the final sheet from the machine and then advanced to her employer's desk with the letters in her hand.

"Is this all, Mr. Scott?"

"No, it isn't," he answered, in a business-like tone. "I'm awfully sorry, little girl, but I've got to ask you to stay awhile this evening. I've run across two or three things in my absence that have to have immediate attention. It won't take you so very long; about an hour, I should think. Has anyone been in?"

"No, sir. No one."

"That's just the way; plenty of privacy when I'm not here." His bit of irony met instant justification, for there came a knock and Crane's skulled-capped head bobbed in.

"Anything more for me, sir?" he asked.

"No, there isn't. I've got some work to do and I don't want to be bothered. Lock up your office and the vaults and go home."

"Yes, sir."

The millionaire took out his morocco-covered note book and ran through the pages.

"Oh, yes," he said presently, "there is something I want to ask you about, Miss Meyer. Miss Wiggins wrote a letter for Mr. Stuart the other day. Do you remember it?"

"I don't know . . . Yes, you mean when you . . . sent me out?"

"Exactly. I ran across Stuart at the club to-day and he tells me that this letter—of rather a personal matter—was duplicated. He saw that by an examination of the original. He hadn't noticed it at the time. Do you know what was done with that duplicate copy?"

"Why, I think . . . it's in the desk . . . I'm not sure. I'll look." She searched through one of the drawers and brought forth a yellow carbon copy of the letter.

"Yes, that's it," said Scott hastily, and realizing that she had probably read it, added;

"that's Miss Wilson, the young woman that was run down by my automobile."

"Yes? Didn't you have a stenographer by that name?" she queried with unusual temerity.

"Why . . . er . . . possibly," rising and coming towards her, "some similar name. I can't remember. Don't think I ever paid much attention to my employees . . . until you came."

She flushed and her long, black lashes covered her eyes. Scott drew in his breath noiselessly as he turned away. The eyes of the gray wolf shown as they had never shown before. He stepped back to his desk and took up the letters she had left there.

"You'd better sign these and seal them," he said, "I don't believe I have to read over your letters any more. You've become quite efficient."

He went to the door leading to the general office and looked out. Her back was to him and as she clapped down the rubber stamp of his signature he closed the door softly and waited. As she stamped the second letter he

softly turned the lock. She stamped the third and quickly she was drawn back into the embrace of stalwart arms. He crushed her to him and pressed hot lips to hers; to her eyes; across her hair. Her frantic efforts to free herself were as futile as a baby's. As suddenly as he had grasped her he released her and left her reeling in her chair.

"Can't you see how I care for you, Gertrude? I'd do anything in the world for you. Give you anything you want, clothes; money; a car; a home; anything. Don't you care for me just a little?"

Dazed and breathless she scarcely saw him. But through the mist of her scalding tears she saw two glittering, lustful eyes. She staggered back from them with a chair between them.

"Care for you!" she cried, finding voice; "care for you! I hate you!"

"How's *that?* Hate!" He almost hissed the word. All pretense, all cajolery was gone now. The wolf showed his fangs. He reached her with a bound around the chair and pressed her to him again. The second

that his lips left hers, she screamed. He pressed his hand over her mouth and the scarlet of her cheeks grew darker. With a superhuman effort she broke from his embrace and leaped around the corner of her desk.

"Stop!" she cried as he followed, "don't you dare touch me!"

She snatched up a steel paper cutter and held it menacingly toward him.

"You won't run me down with your automobile!"

The wolf was quicker than the fawn. Scott stepped partly around the desk and back and as he bent swiftly forward his hand shot out and clasped her wrist, crunching it until the steel fell from her fingers and clattered to the floor.

"Now, scream, will you? There's no one here to hear you, so scream till you're hoarse. You'll fool me and make me forget myself and then you'll scream, eh! You little cheater! I know your kind! You're mine—mine. Do you hear me? Stop your fighting. It's no use. You don't know me when I *want* something—and I want *you!* You'll have

everything in the world you want and I'll have you."

She cried out again and as he silenced her they heard the rattling of a key in his private door. It was thrown open and Jack rushed toward her.

"What's the matter here!" he cried.

The thwarted wolf stepped between him and the girl.

"None of your business," he retorted; "what are *you* doing here? How dare you!"

"How dare I? How dare you! What were you doing—to—with—that girl?"

The boy's hands were extended, trembling and checked by but a fraction from the older man's throat. Scott faced him without a tremor. Into the livid face of his stepson he glared and held him back by the fierce intensity of his stare.

"Get out of here, Jack!" he demanded. "This is no concern of yours. We'll settle this when we're alone."

"We'll settle it right now."

He looked at Scott then at the tortured features of the girl.

"NOW, SCREAM, WILL YOU? THERE'S NO ONE HERE TO HEAR YOU, SO SCREAM TILL YOU'RE HOARSE."

"Gertrude," he pleaded, "what has happened?" The love note in his voice relaxed her. She sank to a chair beside her desk.

"Oh, Jack . . ." she sobbed.

Her use of the surname and her appealing tone startled Scott out of his serenity.

"Jack?" he echoed. "What's been going on here?"

"What's that to you?" cried the boy. "You're the one to answer that, and to me. I love this girl. She's to be my wife."

"Wife? You're crazy!"

"Yes? Well, better a fool than a scoundrel!"

The boy stepped quickly to Gertrude's side and raised her face to his.

"Tell me, honey, what is it? What has happened here?"

Her tears were eloquent enough accusers. Jack faced his stepfather and advanced with doubled fists.

"You . . . you BEAST!" But his arms fell to his side and he went back to the girl.

"You leave this room," Scott ordered.

"I will . . . and take this girl where she'll

be safe . . . where she'll be safe from you."

"Take her anywhere you want, only stop your preaching! You don't know the circumstances here, Jack."

"Don't I? Don't I? If you intimate to me for one moment that this girl was anything but a victim in this rotten affair, you lie! I don't want any explanation. I have a pretty good idea of what has happened and if you know what's good for you you'll let it go at that."

"Yes. I suppose you can see through closed doors, and I suppose you know all about women and everything. Now let's end this little party right here." Scott drew out his money and peeled off a bill. "Here." He held out the note to Gertrude. "Here's ten dollars; your salary for the week. Now you go!"

"Yes, and I'll go with her!" He turned to Gertrude. "Don't worry, honey," he added softly, "I'll look after you."

"You *will,* will you? *With what? You'll* take care of her? Not with *my* money?"

Scott rushed to the door and snatched up his cane. He lifted it above his head and brought it down smashing through the symbol of the firm.

"Scott & Son, eh! There is no son! Now you go too! You can't frighten me with your college boy heroics."

"You don't mean that, sir?"

"Oh, I don't mean it? *Don't I?* You insult me before my own . . . before this whimpering stenographer and I don't mean it! Here, young woman, take this money. You'll need it; and take my advice and leave that youngster alone. Whatever he said to you can't count. If he has anything to do with you I'll strip him so flat he won't have carfare. He'll change his tune before long. Don't fool yourself with any wild dreams, for they won't come true. He hasn't a dollar and he'll do as I say. Now go!"

He threw open the door and the remaining glass of the shattered pane crashed to the floor.

"Remember what I tell you. And I always keep my word."

Jack stood like one dumbfounded and the girl passed slowly out. Scott slammed the door and stood before it.

"Now don't be a fool, Jack, forget this crazy business."

But with a plunge the boy threw him aside and leaped through the broken frame.

"Gertrude!" he called. "Gertrude! Wait! I'm coming!" But the click of the elevator door and the swirl of the downward car told Scott the boy had been too late. He came racing back down the corridor and confronted his stepfather.

"Where does that girl live?" he cried.

"How should I know, Jack. Now don't be an ass. Come down to earth."

"Where does that girl live?"

"I don't know, I told you; now come on, and let's square this thing."

"You can't square anything with me. I want you to tell me where that girl lives or by God I'll choke it out of you!" His trembling hand clutched at the lapels of Scott's coat.

"Take your hands off of me. Have you lost your mind?"

"Yes, I've lost my mind, but I'll find it again when I've found that girl."

"Then I'm afraid you're doomed to Bloomingdale. She is one in fifty thousand."

"She's one in a million!" the boy cried, and rushed after her.

CHAPTER XXI

OUT OF BONDAGE

GERTRUDE rushed from the elevator dry eyed and bent on nothing but home. She had run the gamut of her emotions. Now that it was all over, that she had escaped the wolf's fangs at the cost of her position, she didn't dread telling her mother so much. Some sense of exquisite relief buoyed her up. She was startled by her sudden realization of these feelings and found herself trying to analyze them.

It is true that next to securing a position there is nothing that gives one quite such a thrill as losing it. That is the perennial call of the wild; the cry of liberty dominant in the human breast. We are by nature, nomads. The conventions assumed and the duties with which we tax ourselves are but shackles, after all. Days and months and years of bondage domesticate and tame us, till

at last, like the caged canary, we become involuntary prisoners and, even if the door is open, we hop from perch to perch oblivious to the great unknown. Then, if we are thrust out, hurled bodily from the routine, we feel the loosening of the bonds and sniff the air of freedom.

But when Gertrude reached her home and passed into the dark passageway of the tenement, much of this strange exuberance was spent. Out of the throng, and in the loneliness of her dismal environ, her thoughts turned suddenly to the new hope and light of her life she had left behind. Jack was lost to her; she was sure of that.

The realization of this loss depressed her utterly so that instead of entering with a spirited greeting for her mother, as she had intended, her downcast features betrayed her the moment she went in. She made no pretense of courage now, but threw herself into her mother's arms and burst into tears.

"Du lieber Gott in Himmel!" exclaimed the startled widow. "What is it?"

"Mamma, I've lost my position. I . . .

wanted . . . to keep it . . . from you, but I couldn't. I've been discharged." She stepped back and through her tears saw the dismay and bitter disappointment that she had so dreaded. It was the picture she had harbored on more than one occasion when she needed some spur to drive her on in her battle with the wolf. She sank to a chair beside the table, spread with its coarse crockery for the evening meal.

"Don't look at me that way, mamma. I couldn't help it. It just had to come and I've been keeping it from you for weeks."

"Yes, it had to come," the widow echoed. "No such luck can last by me! But," she added impetuously, "what did you do? You said that man liked you so much."

"That was it; he liked me too much . . . the wrong way."

"Wrong? How was it wrong?"

"Oh, mamma, that man Scott was a devil. You don't know what my life has been there. He started making love to me from the first minute. To-night he kept me after the rest had gone and grabbed me in his arms and

. . . kissed me. I screamed and his son came. They had a terrible quarrel. . . . Mr. Scott gave me my money and told me . . . to go."

Her curtailed recital of the scene and the image of Jack that her words recalled brought the tears afresh. In the roiled brain of the broken hearted mother there raced a chain of conflicting thoughts; pity and maternal apprehension for the girl mingled with distress for the loss of good fortune. She couldn't quite concede the inevitableness of it, or lay all the blame on Scott.

"You screamed?" she repeated in a questioning way.

"Yes. I was crazy with fright . . . and shame. The old man had the look of a devil, I tell you, and when he lifted me in his arms and kissed me . . . I screamed."

The mother came closer and peered down into her daughter's face.

"Gertie," she said softly. "Was that all he did . . . kiss you?"

"That was enough. I don't know what he *might* have done, if Jack—that's his son—hadn't come in."

"So"—dejectedly—"now it's all off; now it's all in the soup. Now I send Heine and Rudie back to the asylum. Now I thought I could take it a little easy, maybe; but it's all over, eh?"

"Don't talk so, mother," the girl faltered bravely. "It'll come out all right. I'll get another position. I've learned a lot there that you never learn in schools."

"Oh, yes; you can get . . . five weeks already you looked, and run around after ads and ate up carfare, and it was nothing. Now you got no recommend and nothing, and no job. Oh, why did you let him kiss you—or why didn't you let him kiss you—or something!"

"Mother! You didn't want me let a stranger . . . you didn't want me let an old . . . married man make love to me!"

The widow raised her hands in mocking protest.

"Ah, make love! That's all you young girls think about. Every man that looks at you cross-eyed—he's making love . . . a rich man like that! He was *fooling* with you."

She was distracted. The plunge from Elysium to the cold realities of renewed hardships unbalanced her, so she argued not what she believed but what she would make herself believe. Gertrude was startled and shocked. Such sentiment and speech she had never heard her mother utter before. She felt a rising resentment.

"This wasn't any fooling," she answered bitterly, "he's a bad, dangerous, old man. He got into trouble with the stenographer he had before me and had to pay her five thousand dollars."

"That's a lot of money for stenographer."

Gertrude jumped to her feet.

"Mother!" she exclaimed. "You wouldn't *sell* me for five thousand dollars, would you?"

"Sell you—bah! Nobody tries to sell you. But I bet it was a lot your fault. If it was some nice young good-for-nothing, maybe you wouldn't scream. But a harmless, old man, you quick get hysterics and lose your job!"

"Harmless!"

"What do you know? Maybe he had a daughter that looked like you and he liked

you for that. What do you know, maybe he just wanted to find out for himself if you was a good girl or not. Did you stop to think? Did you remember that we send Heine and Rudie away again and that we must *eat*—when you screamed?"

"I didn't have time to think, mother, but—"

"And me," interrupted the widow petulantly, "where do I come in? Eight years since your father died and left me with you and your little brothers. I slaved for you. I didn't want that you work in the laundry like me and I gave you an education. Mrs. Schmidt was right; she said: 'don't do it, Mrs. Meyer; education gives them girls stylish notions.' But I send you through business college, didn't I? I made you nice clothes, didn't I? I send my two little boys to the orphan asylum and I gave it all to you." She held out her red calloused hands. "Look! Look!" she shouted, *"for you!"*

Gertrude buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, mamma, don't! Don't! I can't bear to hear you talk that way."

"Huh! I thought I was through my work-

ing and my worry; I thought I could have a lay off from that steaming laundry where I slave away my life. You come home, you say you've got a job and it was a classy job, with fancy money; and I was so glad. And I told everybody. . . . Mrs. Schmidt, Mrs. Snyder, Mrs. Baumgarten. . . . . Now what? Tomorrow I go back to the laundry; Heine and Rudie I send them back to that pest house." The bitterness of her tone changed suddenly to one of sorrowful appeal. "Oh, Gertie, you done me a rotten trick . . . when you screamed. You forgot you had a mother; that's what you did, didn't you?"

"No, no, mother. It's hard, I know. But I couldn't do anything else. I'll get another position soon, mother—"

"And I'll get one sooner—in a laundry! No, I won't do it!" Her voice now was high pitched and strident. "You hear me? I won't do it! You with your silly story that everyone tries to make love to you. Since when are you such a beauty? You get them notions out of *books,* I think so. And for that I worked all these years, for you to get crazy

and quit a job . . . like that!" She snapped her fingers in high dudgeon and disdain.

"But I didn't quit it. He paid me for the full week and threw me out."

"Maybe he did right, too. Making quarrels between father and son . . . such rich men, too! What right have you got to be so fussy? That's for rich girls . . . maybe they can afford it . . . and *they* don't!"

"Mother! Don't make me believe that you wanted me to—"

"Wanted you to what? I don't know nothing about it. . . . All I know is if a girl has some sense she always takes care of herself . . . without giving up jobs so her poor mother has to keep her. I bet if the son had kissed you you wouldn't have screamed, eh? You'd have screamed for more, maybe!"

"He did kiss me," the girl answered softly, "and I didn't scream."

"Why?"

"Because he is a good, clean man, and wants to marry me."

The widow, pouring coffee from a tin pot, put down the cup and stared, nonplussed. She

forgot to right the pot and the scalding liquid splashed to the table.

"Gott!" she exclaimed, when some of it struck her hand, and brought her to her senses. "He wants to what!"

"He wanted me to marry him," Gertrude repeated, sadly.

"That millionaire's son—wanted you—to marry him? *Wanted,"* she repeated, "and doesn't he want to now?"

"I suppose he does."

"You suppose he does. . . . You sit there like somebody's dead and a millionaire wants to marry you!"

"He isn't a millionaire, mother. He isn't even a millionaire's son. Jack's only a stepson."

"By a millionaire, even a stepson is rich."

"But Jack isn't. Mr. Scott swore he'd cut him off without a cent if he had anything more to do with me."

"Foolishness! Nonsense! Don't you believe it. They all say that. He'll forgive . . . every day it gives a story in the paper like that."

"But you don't know this man."

"I don't care nothing. You know his stepson. Dot's enough. When is he coming here?"

"He isn't coming. He doesn't know where we live."

"Go 'phone him then." She reached down into her dress for her pocket book. "Here," she said, "here's a nickel."

"No," Gertrude persisted, "I don't want him to find me."

"Are you crazy? Is he so terrible as all that?"

"Terrible! He's the grandest man in all the whole world."

"And you don't want to 'phone him or write to him?" She reached out and took the girl by the arm. "Ach du lieber! Gott in Himmel! Bies du dier frieht! A rich young fellow, he wants to marry you and you even *love* him, and you run away from him!"

"Yes, that's it, mother. I love him so much that I won't ruin him."

"More foolishness! Always the other peo-

ple you think of, with them fancy story book craziness in your head. You know what you're doing? You could be his wife. . . . I would be his mother-in-law; a chance like that to throw away because you figure out nonsense from your head that you would ruin him, eh? But I ain't crazy up side down. If you won't 'phone that young fellow or go after him, why I'll go. That's what!"

"You!"

"Yes, me!"

"Mother!" the girl exclaimed, "I won't let you go! You wouldn't dare!"

"I wouldn't dare, eh?" She spread apart her hands in gesture. "On the one side stands this shack and the laundry; over there's a millionaire. . . . I should . . . be his . . . mother-in-law . . . and I won't dare!" She stepped quickly to the wall for her hat and shawl that hung from a nail. Gertrude stood watching her like one dazed, until her mother's excited tones again aroused her.

"Gertie, where's that ten dollars?"

"For what?"

"For a lawyer, that's what! You'll see whether that boy will marry you. I'll make him."

The girl backed away with hands behind her clutching her purse.

"You shan't have it for such a thing!"

"Gertie, giebt mir das Geld!" and she accompanied the demand with physical reënforcement of it. She seized the girl's arms, wrenched the purse from her hand and took out the bill.

"Mamma! Don't! Please . . . don't! I couldn't stand it. Please, mamma . . . you can't understand."

"No, never can I understand! You work in that laundry eight years, ten hours a day, and you'll understand, Gertie . . . enough not to let go a millionaire when God sends him to you. Now, get out of my way," she ordered, as the girl stepped between her and the door; "I don't listen to no more foolishness. I get a lawyer."

"Mamma," cried Gertrude, struggling, "if you do that I'll kill myself. I can't stand it! Please don't go!"

"Then you go! You go, then! I wait for you till you get back. Bring me an answer . . . when he marries you . . . everything. You hear me? It's no use you should fool me because if I don't go to-day I can go to-morrow. Do you go, or do I go?"

Her words struck like cold steel, but Gertrude saw the futileness of appeal. She must think out some escape; some way to spare herself and save Jack, but go to him she must, rather than have her mother go. With a look of utter helplessness she moved slowly to the door and passed out.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LAST CROSSING

AT the moment that Gertrude started to telephone him Jack was closeted with a superintendent of one of the big detective agencies supplying such meager clews to her whereabouts as he could. After his precipitous parting from his stepfather, he had first rushed to the elevated station where he thought he could head her off, but Gertrude had unwittingly evaded him by taking a street car. So, having already experienced defeat in a personal search for her home, he had decided to place the matter in expert hands.

"You handle our business, I believe, Mr. Jenkins," he said after he had made himself known to the official. "Well, this is a personal matter for me. Nothing mysterious. I want you to find a needle in a haystack—a girl named Gertrude Meyer."

The detective, with that wonted perspicac-

ity of his kith and kin, inquired where the girl lived.

"Why, if I knew that, sir, I'd find her myself. She hasn't run away. At least, I don't think she has. It's simply that I want to get into communication with her at once. To-night, if I can."

Speaking with a nervous restlessness Jack hurried through a narration of such details as he thought necessary. He omitted, of course, the quarrel with his father and also the quite essential item of a description of the girl. This the sleuth humbly requested.

"Well, Mr. Jenkins," he revealed, "she's seventeen and probably about the prettiest girl in New York." Retaining his sitting posture he drew his hand across his chin: "I should say she comes up to about here on me."

The detective's pompous dignity relaxed. "And you, Mr. Scott," he laughed; "how tall are you?"

"Five feet, nine."

"Then, the young lady, I should say, is about five and four. Now what does she look like?"

"She's very beautiful, I told you," the boy retorted.

"Yes, I know; but the details; hair, eyes, features, clothes and all that."

"Oh! Well, she has sort of golden brown hair, blue eyes—very large, with the prettiest kind of brows and lashes—"

"Dark?" Mr. Jenkins divined.

"Yes, and very long—the lashes, I mean. And her complexion is—oh—"

"Peaches and cream."

"That's it to a tee. And she wore a blue serge sailor suit, a dumpy little hat—black velvet, I guess. Don't know just how you'd describe it; shaped like this." And he pictured its contour with his hands. "Tan shoes and a black coat of a kind o' rough curly stuff. Can't tell you what it is for the life of me, though I might go to a store with one of your men and point it out."

"No, I guess that won't be necessary, Mr. Scott. If the girl hasn't left her home we ought to be able to make out. I'll put a couple of men on the trail at once."

"Put four or five on. Pick your lucky num-

ber and don't spare any expense. I'll pay the bill."

"Where shall we communicate with you, at the office, or your home?"

"Home," the boy answered. "I won't be at the office—for a while."

"Very well, we'll call you just as soon as we get a clew."

Jack hurried out to his waiting cab and gave the chauffeur his Fifth Avenue address. It wouldn't be home much longer he knew that. He felt a catch in his throat and a jumping of the heart at the thought of what this rupture would mean to his mother and to Josephine, and of what it meant to him. But it was not of his making. Scott had cast the die when he shattered the symbol of the bond and ordered him from the door. Between Gertrude and his home ties, even those of mother and sister, there was but one choice and he had already made it.

The taxicab chugged along the brilliantly lighted street in a maze of gliding limousines. It was the highway of such as him and his, but he was soon to leave it for the cross road.

What did it matter, after all? Life meant more than motor cars and ball rooms and country clubs. There came to him the picture of a little cottage that abutted one corner of the links. It was vine covered and had its garden plat and contiguous fields. He had often eyed it with a sort of alien longing for its lowly comforts and simplicity. Perhaps, he wasn't at bottom an aristocrat. At any rate, this picture brought the thought of Gertrude closer to his heart. He threw open the cab door and shouted a new address to the chauffeur. It was a jeweler's.

"Hurry," he ordered, "it's nearly closing time."

At this shop Jack's transaction took him about three minutes. He bought a plain engagement ring and a wedding band. Then he hurried back to the car. Arrived home, he let himself in with his latch key and rang for the butler.

"Mr. and Mrs. Scott home?" he asked.

"Neither, sir."

"Rollins, I want you to pack up a couple of trunks for me—about enough for a two weeks'

trip. Want to get away at once. Am—going . . . to the country. No dress clothes, or anything like that. You understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Don't set any place for me at dinner tonight. I'll be in the library. If Mrs. Scott comes in, let me know."

"Very well, sir."

Jack withdrew to the library and picked up an evening paper that had been placed on the big center table. He sat down and was turning over its pages aimlessly when the telephone rang. He picked up the receiver and called a gruff "Hello!" At the sound of the answering voice the instrument dropped from his hand and dangled to the floor. He snatched it up.

"Gertrude!" he shouted. "Where are you?"

"At Sixty-second and Second Avenue. Mamma made me call you, Jack." She couldn't tell him the truth. She groped for something less repulsive. "I guess she thinks you . . . might . . . save my . . . position."

His mind worked rapidly. He didn't dare

ask her to wait for him and run the chance of her getting away again. It would take twenty minutes to get the car from the garage and make the trip. If he could only get her started somewhere.

"Gertrude!" he called, "I've got to see you right away. I'm going away—to-night!"

"To-night?" The wire bore a startled sound with a note of sorrowful appeal.

"Yes, right away. And, Gertrude! I had to find you so I've put half a dozen detectives on your trail. Now if one of them should find you there," he prevaricated, "he might take you away—to your home, or some place where I couldn't find you. Now you jump into a taxicab and come here as quick as you can. There's no one home—it'll be all right."

"But, Jack," she answered feebly, "there aren't any taxicabs in this neighborhood."

"Well, telephone for one. You can find a garage five minutes away. Stay in the booth till it comes, and get into it in a rush. You know the number on Fifth Avenue. I'll be watching for you." He pretended there was interference on the wire. "Hello! Hello!

Central," he called, "I'm talking. Hello!" and he clapped on the receiver.

It was a chance, but he felt it was a good one. He mopped the perspiration from his head and paced up and down the room. Then he rang for the butler.

"Rollins, I'm expecting a caller—a young lady. Please stay near the door. Here." He held out a bill. "She'll come in a hired car. Pay the chauffeur. How's the packing, Rollins?"

"Simpson is doing it, sir. Shall I tell 'im to 'urry?"

"No, never mind. You stay down here."

"Yes, sir," said the unruffled Rollins, but as he passed through the portières he murmured: "Something's up for certain. Trunks; young lady—'urry! I 'ope the Missus 'urries."

To Jack it seemed an age before he caught the sound of the bell from the servants' hall. He was at the door as soon as the footman and before the astonished servant he clasped the little figure that came forward in his arms. He led her into the brilliantly lighted hall, across a polished parquet floor and soft rugs

that it seemed a sacrilege to step on. In the rich splendor of this millionaire's palace she stood dazed like some frightened animal that has plunged suddenly from shelter into the open. But Jack gave her little time to contemplate this grandeur. He took her hand and led her toward the drawing-room.

"I don't want to be disturbed, Rollins," he ordered. "If any of them come you needn't say I'm here.

"We'll be alone in here, honey," he whispered as he led her to a tapestried tête-à-tête in a far corner of the big room. "What on earth made you run away like that? You must have flown when you got out of that car. I tried to make . . . Mr. Scott tell me where you lived and when I got down you were swallowed up somewhere in that Broadway crowd."

"But, Jack," she answered softly, "I shouldn't be here. What will your mother say? Please let me get away. I've got you in enough trouble to-day."

"Never mind that, honey. When you leave here, I'm going too. Look! I bought something for you; just a few minutes ago."

The little diamond sparkled even in the dim light that was wafted in from the hall.

"Oh, isn't it beautiful!" she cried. "But, Jack, I can't take that."

"Why not? It's easy to take . . . you take it with one finger . . . the third."

"But, I can't marry you, dear."

"No; not with that, but here's another. See? I'm all prepared."

She smiled up at him, but the great joy that should have shown in those deep eyes was dimmed by sadness and a mist of tears. She was indeed a sorrowful little figure. Her eyes wandered from the love-light in his to the rich furnishings of the big room. It was a realm in which she had no part. The gulf they had crossed in the leveling environ of a business world widened here. The words she would have spoken choked her, and as if divining her thoughts, the boy drew her to his arms.

"Oh, I know what you would say," he whispered. "You think there is no place for you here. Neither is there for me. Listen, honey! I've seen enough of it and had enough of it to find that out. As for my stepfather, the only

bond between him and me is my mother . . . she worships him. I couldn't find it in my heart to do him any harm, although I know all the things he has done. I saw a copy of that Estelle Wilson agreement on your desk. I could force him to provide for me if I wanted to. But loving you the way I do, I could never be comfortable again in his presence and loving my mother, I cannot punish him."

"Then, what can *you* do?"

"Take you away and fight it out for ourselves . . . and for each other."

"But you'd have to work . . . work for someone else, and you've never done that, Jack."

"No, I've never done it; but do you think I'm a baby? I guess if Crane can support a wife and family, I can. Say, honey, did you ever look at one of those 'why pay rent when you can own your own home' signs? Twenty-five dollars down and ten dollars a month? Cozy little places with a flower garden and ivy running up and down . . . and a mortgage all

over. And maybe we could buy a little Ford."

She drew herself gently away from his arms.

"Oh, it's wonderful, my dear boy, but you know we can't do it . . . that I can't take you away from your mother . . . and this." She raised her hand in meek tribute to his surroundings. "Please, Jack; don't tempt me."

"Yes, I know," he laughed, "I'm the original little serpent; only instead of tempting you out of the Garden of Eden, I'm tempting you into a little garden of our own. Now stop protesting, honey. You're going to marry me . . . to-night!"

She yielded again to his arms.

"Oh, you wonderful boy," she murmured. "Why couldn't you have been born poor like me?"

"Well, I can't help that, honey. Children make a lot of mistakes in choosing their parents. But I proposed to you when I thought I was rich. Won't you take me, dear, now . . . when I'm poor?"

They sat for a moment in silence till her

arms stole about him this time. Then she looked up at him.

"I guess I'm a horrid, selfish girl, Jack," she yielded, "but I just can't help it!"

He kissed her and stepped quickly away. They had heard the street door close and now the subdued tones of his mother, questioning the imperturbable Rollins.

"Wait here, honey," Jack whispered. "I won't be long."

CHAPTER XXIII

WHERE THE HEART IS

"HELLO, mother!" the boy greeted as he kissed first her, and then his sister; "you're looking like a bride to-night." There was no false note in his spontaneous welcome. He felt as light hearted as the words implied.

"Do I, Jack," she smiled. "Well, I don't feel like one. I've been to the matinée with Josephine and to two receptions. I'm nearly dead."

"And please, sir, what do I look like?" the girl pouted, after she had returned his caress.

"Why, little sister, like the bright jewel in the bride's coronet."

"She's all of that, Jack, but if we don't look out, she'll need polishing soon. Between theaters and dances and charities . . . to say nothing of Paul, I think we're losing a little of that boarding-school energy and a little of

upstairs and lie down for half an hour before dinner, dear," she added. "Jack and I are old war horses; the more we go, the more we can go. Now run along; I'll call you."

"We saw Esther again to-day, Jack," the girl teased as she turned at the stairs.

"Oh, drat, Esther! Haven't you got troubles enough of your own without trying to make some for me?"

She winked back at him from the landing. Being in the know, she got the more enjoyment out of her badinage.

"I suppose you *will* be marrying some day," his mother sighed as they moved toward a divan.

"Undoubtedly, mother; but you needn't be so sad about it. I hope it won't be such a tragic event."

"But I shall hate to lose my boy."

Her words reached a trembling little listener in the room beyond, and Gertrude shuddered at them. She felt like a burglar in the night. But she heard, too, Jack's cheerful response.

"You're not going to lose him. We'll always have a place for you, mother."

"We?" the mother echoed. "You talk as if you had already found someone."

"I have . . . got the house all built . . . in my mind."

She turned searching eyes to his. "Jack!" she exclaimed, "are you fooling with me?"

"No, mother; I'm perfectly serious and perfectly sober."

"And you've never said a word?"

"I haven't had time. I want to talk to you now."

"Then you've only just decided?"

"Well," he answered, laughing, "it's been simmering for about a month. Yesterday it boiled over and to-night it's . . . cooked."

"It isn't Esther?"

"Goodness, no. To hear you and Joe talk one would think Esther was the only marriageable girl in New York."

"Then it's Madge."

"No, Madge powders her nose too much."

"Jack!" his mother exclaimed; "don't joke

about so serious a matter and *don't* keep me in suspense. Who is it?"

"A stenographer."

"A what?"

"A stenographer in father's office. Now don't look at me that way," he added in answer to her incredulous stare. "She's the finest little girl in all this world."

"But, my dear, dear boy, do you know anything about her . . . about her family, I mean?"

"No, but this girl must have a wonderful mother!"

"Your father," she gasped; "does he know? What will he say?"

"He's said it. He said he'd strip me flat and disown me. He jolted me out of the firm this afternoon and I'm a pauper. So, why shouldn't I marry a girl as poor as myself?"

"You and your father haven't quarreled, Jack?"

He felt his heart go out to her at the fear and apprehension in her tone, but there was no use in mincing matters now.

"I should think you would call it that,

mother . . . after what I've told you. We fought, almost."

"Over a stenographer!" She spoke these words with infinite scorn, yet she little realized the real significance of them—that the man she had idolized for twenty years was the actual offender, and that only consideration for her had stayed the hand of her boy. The disdain was meant all for Jack, but he had expected it.

"I knew it, mother," he answered sadly. "You speak just about as he did, only he was more violent about it. He doesn't want me to marry a stenographer, of course, and you don't either, but she isn't a stenographer to me, mother. She's the girl I love."

"But, Jack," more gently, "perhaps there's something about the girl you don't understand. Your father is an experienced man of the world and I'm inclined to take his view of the matter. She's probably a scheming little minx who has set her cap for you and you, with your big heart, have been taken in. Your father is not easily deceived, Jack."

The ridiculous irony of it all disarmed him

—her credulity; her blind trust and her instant denunciation of a defenseless girl—his answering smile was sardonic and his retort the cynical voice of the disillusioned.

"He was deceived this time, mother," he told her. "He was badly fooled."

"What do you mean?" The abruptness of her question, the fixed look with which she held him, warned him he was on perilous ground and he backed away from it.

"I mean," he answered quickly, "that this girl is everything she should be. She is everything I want in a wife. I took her in my arms and told her that I loved her, and she believed me. Now I don't want any rice and old shoes and I don't look for any bursts of enthusiasm. I know what father thinks and I know the dried up old crows in our select circle will almost have a stroke when they hear the news and then will convalesce and grow fat on the scandal. And I don't care. But I do want my mother, my own dear, sweet mother, to open her arms and take this girl to her heart and say: 'My boy loves you . . . God bless

"MY DEAR BOY, YOU KNOW I LOVE YOU . . . THAT I WANT YOU HAPPY . . . BUT . . . OH, I CAN'T DOUBT YOUR FATHER'S JUDGMENT."

you!' You didn't think I was so hard hit, did you?"

He had put his arms about her. She drew gently back and looked at him.

"My dear boy, you know I love you . . . that I want you happy . . . but . . . oh, I can't doubt your father's judgment."

"But you haven't seen her yet," he persisted cheerily.

"That makes no difference. If your father disapproves, it's sufficient reason for me, too."

He got up and walked toward the big open fireplace and stood tapping at a log with his boot. Twice he started to answer her, but choked back the words. When he turned all the buoyancy of his boyish spirit was gone; his lips were pressed into lines of firm resolve.

"If you feel that way about it, mother, there's nothing more to be said. Gertie and I will fight it out alone."

"But you've no income of your own, Jack. Money, I know, is a hard and unromantic

thing for one in your frame of mind to talk about, but you've never known what it is to be without it. The thought of you penniless . . . with a wife—"

"If that's all that's worrying you, mother," he interrupted, "why cheer up! I'm not such a weak sister and I'm not afraid to hustle. You have Josephine and yourself to look after —or will have her for a while. As for Gertie and me . . . can't you see us? A little picture book house in the country with the fair bride studying the cook book while Mr. Husband hunts a job!" He caught her arm again. "Mother, wait till you see her; she's a perfect little flower. Now wait."

He skipped passed her to the drawing-room and returned leading the perfect flower by the hand.

"Mother," he said as she drew back in astonishment, "this is Gertrude Meyer, my fiancée. My mother, Gertie."

"Oh, I'm pleased to meet you, m'am."

The note of demure hopefulness and mingled admiration found no echoing response. The flower might be perfect, but it

had grown in another world. And it was meant for warmth and sunshine, so it shivered in the vicinage of this cold hauteur. An icy "How do you do," finished it completely, and it took refuge in warm tears and sheltering arms.

"Come, Gertrude," the boy comforted as he raised her face to his. "I guess we're not wanted here. Let's go."

He led her to the door and summoned Rollins to fetch his coat and hat.

Like some grim statue in marble—some unrelenting symbol of inviolable convention, his mother stood and watched them. But the frigidity of her outward calm was rent by febrile emotion within. Her rapturous dreams and plans of triumphs for her boy she saw vanishing; but more than this was the dominant prowess of mother love; it broke through this boreal veneer—for after all, it was only that which stayed her—and as Rollins swung open the street door and stood holding it for them to pass, she cried out:

"Jack—Jack!"

He turned and was in her arms and wel-

come tears of mutual surrender were in the eyes of both.

The little figure in the doorway stood quite alone like some masquerader at a scene in which she had no part; but her ostracism was momentary. This wonderful woman of another world advanced now, holding her boy's hand in hers. When she broke the pulsing silence it was in the low, soft voice of comforting affection:

"And you are the little girl my boy has picked out of all the world to be his wife?" She bent forward and with a snow-white hand on Gertrude's head, kissed her.

"Oh, mother, you're a peach!" the boy cried. "You two are going to love each other. I knew it. Now, run upstairs and get chummy. I want to pack a few things before I join you, then Gertie and I will go."

"Jack! You're not going to-night?"

"Yes, mother; before dinner. Father's not going to recede from his stand, and you know it. I don't want any quarrel here, or to submit you to any unpleasantness. I'll let you know where we are. Now, run along."

She acquiesced, leading Gertrude to the stairs. With fidelity to her truer self she had trodden on the claims of snobbishness and shown this child her boy loved, where her heart was. But she could not bridge the gulf as easily as Jack had. There were others to consider. She must wait the verdict of her husband.

Jack addressed the impassive butler who had remained a silent witness to this kaleidoscopic pantomime of domestic emotions. He had had no chance to withdraw.

"I won't take those trunks with me to-night, Rollins. I'll send for them in the morning."

"Very well, sir."

They heard the honk of an auto horn which Rollins recognized as his master's. He stepped again to the door and while Jack stood irresolute for the minute, there entered Scott and Stuart, his valued "fixer."

Scott nodded curtly to his stepson.

"Made up your mind to show some sense, eh? Glad to see you came home."

The boy's reply was as cold and less compromising.

"I came home to pack, sir."

"Now look here, Jack," said the older man advancing, "this thing can be adjusted. Just drop this hard headed attitude of yours and we'll straighten matters out." He smiled at Stuart. "Here's one of the best little adjusters in the world."

"I'd rather not discuss it, if you please. I'm leaving to-night." He backed away from the proffered hand and walked deliberately to the stairs.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

"WHAT did I tell you, Stuart," the importer declared, as the figure of his stepson disappeared above the landing. "The boy's gone mad."

"Oh, don't throw up your hands at the first signs of defeat. I'll see that girl in the morning and pour a little legal advice—on the bias—into her ear, and ten to one she'll be so scared that a third degree couldn't get a coherent sentence out of her. I think she'll take that job up in Montreal you spoke of and that will settle all our worries."

When Jack, rushing in the wake of Gertrude, had left his stepfather alone in the office, Scott's first thought as in all such imbroglio's had been of Stuart. Fortunately he had been able to reach the lawyer, who had tarried later than usual at his office, and had summoned him to his aid. Stuart's analytical

mind had developed some inkling of the situation as soon as he saw the shattered glass. The details Scott supplied and between them they endeavored to reach some solution of the new difficulties.

The lawyer suggested getting Gertrude out of the city. "She needs work," he told Scott, "and if you offer her something good, I'm pretty sure she'll accept. If she doesn't, get word to her mother and with a little cash in advance, it won't take much pleading to bring her into line."

Scott had agreed to this plan although he didn't have much hope of Gertrude accepting it. He expressed that doubt now.

"I can't get it quite clear why you think she will be willing to go away," he said; "there are plenty other positions in New York. If she managed to worry along five or six weeks without work before I employed her, I imagine she can do so again."

"Yes, but you don't do the girl justice, Scott. I believe she really loves that boy and if we impress her with the idea that this is the way she could save him; restore him to his place

in the firm, it will win her. I think that's our big hunch; it's an inspiration."

"You're just full of inspirations, Stuart. This one sounds good, but somehow I can't believe that it is going to be as smooth sailing as you think. It's a beastly mess, I tell you."

"Oh, cheer up, I'll straighten it all out in the morning."

Scott wasn't so sanguine; he looked it. He urged: "You'd better go to-night if you're going at all. The boy'll probably be on his way there in a few minutes and for all you know he may take her away and marry her to-night. Can't you figure out some way for us to keep him here?"

"How's he going to find her?"

"There's something in that, I'll admit, but we can't take such chances. He might hire someone. A lot of private detectives, you know."

"Oh, they couldn't find an elephant in a cornfield."

Scott ceased his panther-like pacing of the room and confronted the lawyer with a resigned:

"Well, have it your own way, but don't you fall down on this one. It's too close to home," he whispered. "The Lord only knows what that boy will tell his mother when it comes to a show-down."

"Now there you go on a wrong tangent again, Scott," the lawyer retorted, "I've never bungled a case yet and I'm not going to begin now. In the first place, Jack hasn't a dirty streak in him. He doesn't like me, for some unaccountable reason, but just between you and me he wouldn't disturb one hair of his mother's head for all the money you've got."

"Yes . . . he hates me . . . now."

"But he loves his mother. No, I tell you the only leak that can percolate, is through the girl. She's young, but I'm sure she worships the boy. But if she has told her mother then, Scott—" he laughed and threw up both hands—"we better go back after the check book."

They were interrupted by the return of the butler who stood by like a private waiting to salute, as silent and submissive as the servile Crane.

"Well, what can I do for you, Rollins?" the importer snapped.

"Beg pardon, sir. Could you tell me how many guests there will be for dinner?"

"Guests? I'm not the housekeeper here, Rollins," he turned to his legal aide. "Oh, pardon me, Stuart. Will you stay?"

"No thanks. I'm expected home."

"And the young lady?" continued Rollins with an inward chuckle again not unlike Crane's. Scott whirled and faced him.

"What young lady?"

"Why, Mr. Jack's fiancée . . . Miss Meyer."

Utter hopelessness was the signal Stuart's eyes flashed back to the millionaire. They looked from each other to the immobile features of Rollins.

"Where? What? Where is she? What are you talking about?" Scott exclaimed when he found voice.

"She's upstairs, sir, with Mrs. Scott."

"Who brought her here? What's she doing here?"

"I don't know, sir. Mr. Jack seemed to expect her."

"How long has she been here?"

"I should say . . . half an hour."

Scott glowered at the bearer of these tidings like some Roman general who faces a courier heralding defeat. He spared his head but waved him from his presence.

"And the dinner, sir?" insisted the raven.

"To h—l with the dinner. Get out of here!" He turned to Stuart. "Well, Mr. Fixer, I guess that settles it, doesn't it? The girl upstairs with *my wife*. And—Jack there, too, now. *Some party*. Can you hear them telling that little story . . . that baby faced ingenue chiming in . . . whenever Jack forgets an important feature. Yes, Stuart, I guess this is the end."

The lawyer walked over and flopped down on a window seat. He picked up a bronze paper cutter and toyed with it in his hands.

"Don't do that," Scott blurted, "you make me nervous. Can't you say something instead of sitting there like a frog?"

"Oh, hold your horses, Scott," the lawyer

retorted a little testily. "Give a man a chance to think." He looked up, and, quietly:

"I bet you Jack has smoothed it over to save his mother. As for the girl, I don't know, but if she's here she has scarcely had time to go home and tell *her* mother. So that angle is protected."

"Time? Of course, she's had time. She's had time to run home and bring some angry old woman with soapsuds dripping off her elbows here with murder in her eyes. Come, Stuart, think quick. What's the answer? Suppose Jack and the girl are telling my wife . . . and it's ten to one . . . what is my defense?"

"You don't need any, I tell you. They are up there talking baby blue ribbons and love's young dream. The girl hasn't told her own mother. . . ." He was interrupted again by Rollins who, looking neither to right nor left walked to the street door. He opened it and turning, announced: "Mrs. Meyer."

"My God!" exclaimed Scott. "This *is* the end." Without waiting for further invitation, Gertrude's mother entered and came al-

most on a trot towards the two men. The soapsuds were not dripping from her elbow but the murder was in her eye. For some reason she settled on Stuart as the chief offender and faced him.

"So you send around detectives . . . comes by my house . . . a man what says he's a detective who wants to know if lives here a Gertie Meyer. Now don't; it ain't no use; you can't do no funny business with her. I came here myself to protect my innocent child."

The lawyer interrupted with upraised hand. "Now, my dear woman . . ."

"Don't you dear woman me! I'll show you! Where's that son? You can't fool mit my girl!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," said Stuart suavely. "I'm Mr. Scott's attorney." And he thereon resigned from that capacity, bowing towards his client.

She advanced on Scott and he retreated step for step.

"So you are the devil who kissed my child! So you're the lowlife what thinks because he's

got a little dirty money he can take away from me my Gertie! What I watched over and worked for so many years. These hands, look at them!"

Scott adjusted his eyeglasses and examined the members with apparently a most sincere inspection. His delicate irony in this moment of serious peril amused Stuart so that he had to bite his lips to keep from breaking into a laugh. But it was all lost on the roiled mother.

"Yes, look!" she cried. "For her, you see. So she would be a good woman those hands are like this. And when she told me what you'd done, it broke my heart. You can ask her if it didn't. My heart was just broke."

At this piteous appeal which, unknown to Scott, was somewhat tempered by Mrs. Meyer's prodigious fortitude at the moment of her daughter's revelation, the millionaire feigned surprise.

"I don't think I understand you, madam. My name is Scott. Did you want to see me? Isn't it somebody else you have in mind? Haven't you made a mistake?"

"I made a mistake that I didn't bring my lawyer with me. I'm a woman and I don't talk such good English, but I come to see *you,* all right. You and your son! He what talks to her about marriage rings and runs away. Dot's a fine story and you want now to turn me out in the street because he wants to marry my angel; my beautiful Gertie." She stepped closer and held up a trembling hand. "It don't go with me. How about it? I know, or I don't move!"

Scott was desperate. He looked from his intrepid accuser to Stuart and then towards the stairway. The lawyer vouchsafed no solution so he spoke out to gain escape at any cost.

"Mrs. Meyer," he said, "it is apparent that you have been imposed upon, but you have evidently mistaken the offender. You speak of detectives. I know nothing about them. I have had no dealings with detectives and have sent none to your house. I have done nothing to cause such an attack from you, and I don't know what to say . . . my foster son . . . I believe, has expressed a desire to make your daughter his wife. They're up . . ."

Stuart interrupted. He addressed the intruder. He had divined now, and rightly, everything that passed between father, son and private secretary, was known to the mother.

"You needn't worry about the young man, Mrs. Meyer," he said suavely. "He will be well provided for if he wishes to marry your daughter."

"If he *wishes?* And if he don't—" she turned from the lawyer to Scott—"I'll have you arrested for what *you* done!"

"You're quite wrong," the fixer insisted, "Mr. Scott has done nothing. The matter, I am sure, will be arranged satisfactorily to all concerned. Now, if you will leave us alone so we can make the necessary provision, you will have no cause to complain."

"When do I know?"

"I will stop at your house in the morning, Mrs. Meyer. Now please leave us to settle this thing. We have a very important business appointment, besides this, but you can trust us to be prepared for you in the morning."

She stood wavering between surrendering to these assurances and demand for more tangible satisfaction. But further persuasion from the lawyer prevailed and she again addressed Scott.

"All right," she agreed, "but I want to tell you, I got a lawyer and you play me no tricks. I tell him everything what my Gertie, she tell me . . . how you kissed her . . . and she screamed . . . and you chucked your son . . ."

Scott raised a hand in appeal. "Please . . . please . . . to-morrow morning."

"All right; I go. You say everything is O. K. I'm satisfied. But remember, don't play me no make-believes. I got a lawyer."

"To-morrow morning, Mrs. Meyer," Stuart said reassuringly. "You'll have no cause to complain." The "fixer" walked with her to the door and as he opened it she turned insistently to Scott. "Remember, to-morrow morning . . . I wait . . . and I got a lawyer."

"Blackmail!" he blurted bitterly as the lawyer came back to him.

"Hardly. I wouldn't call it that."

"Oh, it's cut and dried, just as I told you. The girl . . . the washer woman . . . It's air-tight. Can't you see? They're upstairs with my wife. That clinches it. But I won't fall, Stuart, you hear me? I won't be made a baby of. If my wife knows there is nothing to save. This thing has been a long time coming and now . . ." He stopped and stepped to the wall. "It's money," he continued, as he pressed a button recalling Rollins. "Money; that's what they want, Stuart. Filthy money! The boy can marry the girl without all this crooked work. But it's blackmail and I won't be a party to their game."

"Tell Jack I want to see him," he ordered, as the butler appeared. "Here . . . at once."

He paced up and down. His tread now denoted not fear, or hesitation, but unloosed anger. He was trapped. Yes, but he was ready to fight his way out; not to beg it out. He stopped and faced his aide.

"My God! Stuart, if they had only left my wife out of it . . . they could have had any-

thing, for she's never dreamed of anything like this. Why didn't they come to me first?"

They were kindred spirits, these two men, and Stuart felt a pang of deepest sympathy for the predicament that his friend was mired in. But it wasn't he who had to pay and that made him the calmer. He offered such assurance as he could.

"Oh, stop raving, Scott," he argued, "you may be all wrong. I'm more afraid of that old woman than I am of Jack."

With the utterance of the boy's name they heard his footsteps on the stairs.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WAY OUT

"YOU wanted to see me, sir?"

"Yes. Where's your mother?"

"Upstairs."

"And the girl?"

"Gertrude? She's there, too, with mother."

"Yes. It's a fine game, isn't it, young man? Now I want you to pay a little attention to this. You could have had anything, if you had come out in the open, like a man, but I will *not* be blackmailed."

The boy had stood calmly indifferent, but sprang forward now with flashing eyes.

"You'll not talk that way to me, sir . . . not even here. We've had our words. It's not necessary to banty them further. All I ask now is to be allowed to get out of here . . . without further insults. And," he added, with meaning tone, "I advise you to grant that."

But Scott had thrown discretion to the

winds. While the boy struggled for control Scott made no pretense of it.

"I'll grant you nothing till you hear me," he blurted. "Just remember this: It isn't me you're fighting, it's your mother. Now don't drive me to it, or I'll make out of that door and this house can come tumbling about your ears . . . all of you. I'll not be spanked into being good like a naughty schoolboy. I am Jerrold R. Scott, and don't you forget it. This is *my* house and your mother is *my* wife. Everything that goes on here will be done as I wish. Now go upstairs and tell your mother all you want to!"

In the bitterness of this denouncement his voice had carried to the room above. He didn't notice that as he finished he had another auditor. It was his wife. Pale and with troubled lines of this new apprehension written across her beautiful features, she stepped quickly to his side.

"Jerrold!" she cried softly, "what is it? What is there to tell me?"

Before he could answer the "fixer" essayed his rôle. "Now, my dear Mrs. Scott—"

But Scott stopped him. He was calm now. It was the thick of the battle and his time to lead.

"No, Stuart," he interrupted firmly, "this is one you can't handle."

The lawyer bowed and flushed at the abruptness of the dismissal. He bowed, too, to Mrs. Scott and turned towards the door.

"No, don't go . . . please," the importer urged. "I'll probably need you . . . later. Just wait for me, will you, Stuart, in my den up there? I won't be long."

He went back to the battle plunging blindly toward the abyss of his own making. He addressed his wife.

"This young man . . . your son . . . has taken the bit in his teeth. Just because I won't let him defy me and outrage me, he runs me into a corner and makes me fight my way out. Now, I'm here fighting."

Like an animal at bay Scott stood. To his wife, who was appalled at them, his words seemed alien and brutal.

"Jerrold," she cried, "what do you mean? What has Jack done? He has told me about

your opposition to his marrying that little girl upstairs. . . ."

"Yes, and I suppose he's told you everything else. And it's true . . . every word of it. But I don't propose to be tried like a prisoner before a judge and jury in my own family. I'm guilty," he finished desperately. "Guilty, you understand. Now what are you going to do about it?"

"Guilty!" she echoed. "Jerrold, dear, I don't understand . . ."

"You never did . . . that's why you never suspected. Helen, in my own way, I have been devotedly fond of you. We have a daughter of our own, and this boy . . . this son of yours . . . was, until to-day as my own son. I don't know how to explain it," he stumbled on. "It isn't because I loved you less . . . it isn't because I preferred another woman to you . . . Good heavens, no! There was nothing like that. No man can solve it. The one thing had nothing to do with the other. A man may adore his wife . . . he may be passionately fond of her . . . and yet . . ."

"And yet what?" she interrupted timorously.

"Oh, I don't know, Helen, but I can't ask forgiveness and I won't. It isn't my nature. If this thing can be forgotten—well, that will end it. If not, Stuart will . . . arrange a settlement."

"Jerrold!" The cry was from a dazed and tortured soul, like one groping hopelessly in the dark. "Stuart . . . a settlement!" she echoed. "I don't know what to say; I don't know what you mean."

But Scott, guilty, was obsessed by the sense of it. The love note and appeal in her voice hammered at the barriers of his bravado, but outwardly, he stood firm and persisted:

"Jack's story is true; isn't that enough?"

"No, Jerrold, it isn't enough. I have never attempted to cross your wishes in business or in family affairs. But this seems something more than that. My son will take care of himself, but *our* partnership, Jerrold, cannot be shattered by the breaking of a pane of glass. I tell you I do not understand you. This is some terrible mystery and it isn't fair to keep me in the dark." She put a hand on his

shoulder and looked into his eyes with the mute appeal of a trembling child. "Jerrold!" she cried, half hysterically. "What does it all mean?"

The real man in him spoke now; not the employer of private secretaries and the smirking patron of Kahn's. He laid a hand on his wife's head and stroked her soft hair.

"Don't, Helen; don't! I can't stand this. I have tried to ride the high horse through this unfortunate affair to keep up my own bravado. But I can't. Oh, what a fool I've been . . . what a blind, criminal fool!"

It was Jack who stopped Scott's headlong plunge into the abyss. He stepped quickly to his mother's side and took her from Scott's arms into his own.

"I won't have you going on like this," he told her. "All that I said was true, but you shan't grieve so over it."

"But, there is something else, Jack; there must be."

"No, mother, it was all about my marrying Gertrude."

It dawned suddenly on Scott that he had, in-

deed, been a blind fool. He almost leaped for the boy as a drowning man makes one final lunge to succor. He regarded his stepson with the flash of a thousand hopes shining from eyes that had been dulled by resignation to the toll of his folly.

"You mean—"

"I mean that I told my mother that against your better judgment I chose *your* stenographer to be *my* wife and risked breaking up my family. I am willing to take all the blame. You and mother need not take up *my* fight. I shall leave here immediately."

"Then your mother has nothing to . . . forgive . . . me for? Nothing that requires . . . explanation?"

"No, Jerrold," she interrupted, "I *have* my explanation. Jack is *my* son. I cannot insist on your supporting him further in luxury. I must put sentiment behind me now, and"—a little sadly—"remember my circumstances."

Scott, all his braggadocio gone, stood like some penitent child.

"And this is all . . . all you have to say to me?"

"That is all, Jerrold." She turned toward the stairs. "I shall beg your leniency for my son. If *that* was the cause of your agitation, you need not excite yourself any more about it. If you will pardon me, now I have a few last words to say to my son's fiancée."

"I am to understand—"

"That I have the utmost confidence in my son. And that little girl upstairs may look me squarely in the face and call me 'mother.' That is all she has asked. She shall have it." She moved slowly up the stairs and the importer confronted his stepson.

"You told her nothing . . . nothing about . . ."

"I told her what you heard me repeat here. That was all I had the heart to tell her."

Scott sighed and drew his first full breath of relief.

"And you stopped me just when I was about to reveal the rest of the nasty affair myself. And the girl, Jack?" he added suddenly.

"She has told nothing, sir. If that's all, I'll go up and get her and I won't annoy you but a moment longer."

If Scott contemplated any protest or apologies they were obviated by the entrance of his daughter who came running to him from the stairway and sailed into his arms.

"Oh, daddy!" she cried. "Isn't she wonderful! She's the sweetest, loveliest girl. And daddy—she's just my age. And she's going to marry Jack, and—they're going to have a little cottage with flowers and things—and oh! It's so romantic, isn't it, daddy?"

Scott squirmed gently from her embrace and addressed his stepson:

"Just a word, please—and Joe," he said softly, "you run right back into that room upstairs, and don't you worry about any cottages. And as for flowers—what was that basketful of white roses I saw here last night? Paul has always sent red ones. Is that a hurry up hint to your parents? Run on, now, honey, and you might tell Mr. Stuart he's released from bondage up there."

She stopped half way up the stairs, laughingly hummed a bar of Mendelssohn's wedding march and threw a kiss to Jack, who smiled bravely in return. Having just awak-

ened from her beauty sleep, she had missed the family imbroglio and didn't know what the effort cost him. The boy stood silently by and as he heard Stuart's footsteps on the stairs, turned impatiently to his stepfather with a short:

"What can I do for you?"

"Now just wait a minute," came the elder man's placating reply. "Am I to understand you have no plans for your future support?"

"Not a plan. But I'll get by somehow."

"That Paris man of mine—of ours—Something should be done before that fellow ruins us."

"I should advise you to make a change in Paris."

"How would you like to go over there?" Scott got it out bravely. He cast a side-long glance at Stuart which meant, "Smile and I'll shoot you." But as for Jack, he made no concealment of his surprise.

"You want *me* to work for *you?*" he asked incredulously.

"For both of us—for Scott & Son."

"I thought that was all over?"

"No, my boy, it was my gift to your mother. You spared her one blow—permit me to be as generous. You will like it in Paris. The trip across will give you and—and your bride—a pleasant honeymoon. When can you sail?"

"To-morrow, if you wish it."

"Very well, have it so. I will send Crane up with transportation in the morning."

"I'll go and ask Gertie and you'll have your answer in just a minute." He ran to the stairs and Scott moved over to the lawyer.

"Old man," he said, "I wish you would telephone to-night to the Y. W. C. A. Home, and get hold of that Wiggins girl. Tell her to come to my private office in the morning."

They lighted their cigarettes and through the haze of the blue smoke they smiled silently at each other.

"Secretary or stenographer?" laughed the "fixer."

"Call it what you like, Stuart. The difference has passed out of my life."

"Thank heaven for small favors."

"And I say," Scott went on in even mono-

tone, "find that German woman and her two children. I believe she has a couple of boys just out of an orphan asylum. Get her a house somewhere out in the country, with a cow and —some chickens, you know," he added choking at the word, "they're to be *relations.*"

"Leave it to me, old man; I'll make swells out of your new relatives. Everything's settled—and as usual, out of court. Don't be so downcast. These things are soon forgotten when the goose hangs high. The youngsters will go to France and everything will go peacefully in your family, and say—when I bring the news to that old German Amazon, she and her orphans will do a Second Avenue turkey trot!"

"Please, Stuart . . . please—good night."

"All right, old chap; I'll be going." He turned at the door for his final fling. "Oh, I say, Scott! If you get lonesome at lunch tomorrow telephone me. I'm not beautiful, but I'm safe." He saw his friend's eyes roving over the table in search of the most formidable weapon at large, and with a laugh, the "fixer" slipped quickly through the door.

Scott tarried with his cigarette, staring out through the smoke into visions of—what? A man standing in the wake of a tornado surveying the ruin of his half-wrecked home. His first thought was one of thanksgiving that, when the storm struck, he was in the half-left unscathed. But playing with soap-bubbles and dreaming dreams wasn't Scott's forte. He made money, friends and the intimate acquaintance of private secretaries. If he lost the one, or the other the world was full of more. But he *didn't* want to lose his wife and that hazard seemed passed.

The millionaire became keenly aware of a more pressing need than sentimentality and rang a bell. "Rollins," he queried, "is anyone ever going to announce any dinner in this house?"

"I'll see, sir."

"Do."

There came now his wife and daughter on a little trot down the stairs, Mrs. Scott in the van.

"Oh, Jerrold," she exclaimed, "you've made me the happiest woman in the world."

"That's all right, dear," he said magnanimously. "I'm glad—very glad!"

So, they clustered about him and he smiled as Joe cooed: "You're just the loveliest daddy in the world! And you look so tired!"

"Yes, Joe; it's been a hard day for us all."

He started at the sound of another girlish voice that came, tremulous from midway on the stairs—"It's just like a fairy story—"

"Yes," he communed within himself, "and the dragon's dead."

THE END

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